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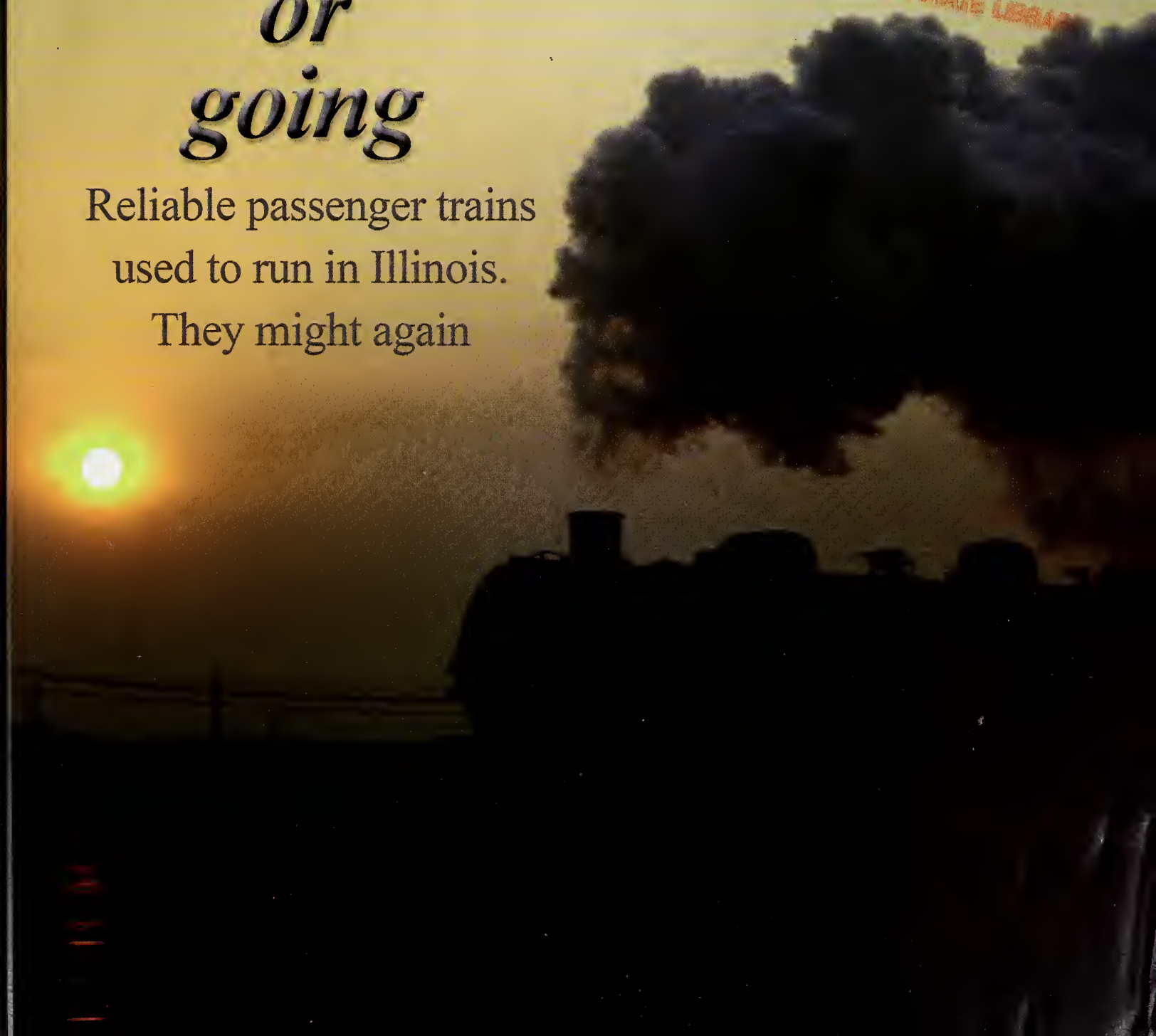
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A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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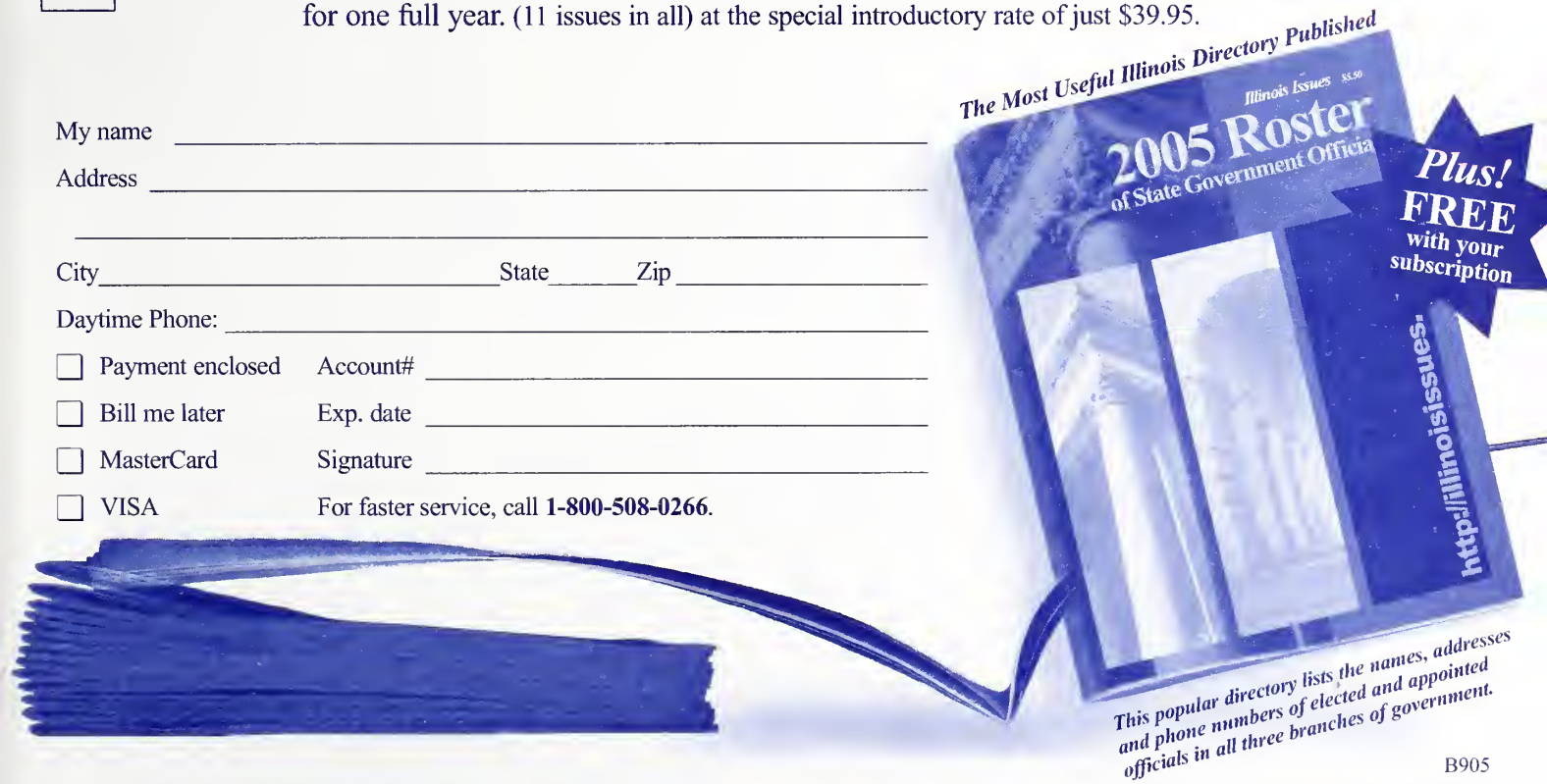
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Politics are behind the failed promise to Illinois schoolchildren

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Ruth Schneider describes at her school are echoed by school officials from Chicago to East St. Louis and farther south.

In fact, we set out to compile a status

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It's true, the state has been hard-pressed of late just to make ends meet.

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Politics are behind the failed promise to Illinois schoolchildren

by Peggy Boyer Long

What does a sewer back-up have to do with education? Or for that matter an electrical short? Or a boiler malfunction?

Quite a bit, it turns out.

One school superintendent tells our Statehouse reporter Pat Guinane her district has had to cancel classes because of sewer back-ups. "We're kind of in a low area," says Ruth Schneider of the Stewardson-Strasburg district, "and when it rains real hard we get sewer back-ups — and sometimes even when it doesn't rain. The lines are just old and crumbling and need to be replaced."

Schneider's district, centered 15 miles north of Effingham in an east central Illinois cornfield, consists of one K-12 building, a section of which is half a century old.

"If we don't get some money for construction," she tells Guinane, "I don't know how we maintain this facility for the 21st century."

Does this matter? There are reasons to believe it does. And the problems Ruth Schneider describes at her school are echoed by school officials from Chicago to East St. Louis and farther south.

In fact, we set out to compile a status report on the condition of Illinois' schools, what Chief Justice Earl Warren, writing in *Brown v. Board of Education*, called "physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors." Sadly, Guinane finds little has changed since Illinois officials hammered out a plan to help local communities repair and rebuild their crumbling and overcrowded schools.

Sadly, Pat Guinane finds little has changed since Illinois officials hammered out a plan to help local communities repair and rebuild their crumbling and overcrowded schools.

In March 1997 (see "The schoolhouse is falling down"), Gary Kelly, the superintendent of DuQuoin School District 300, warned *Illinois Issues* readers, "I truly believe we're getting close to the point where we're putting students at risk every day."

But nearly a decade later, Guinane finds thousands of Illinois elementary and secondary schools still need replacement, expansion or repair. Beyond crucial plumbing upgrades, a state survey released this year shows schools throughout Illinois need rewiring or structural work, new fire alarms or new roofs.

Rochester school district, just east of Springfield, tops the state's priority list. Superintendent Thomas Bertrand tells Guinane one wing of his district's junior high dates to 1921. It needs replacing. "The electrical, the boiler, the plumbing — the whole infrastructure was completely worn out."

The extent of such safety hazards is disturbing enough. But Guinane discovered something else. Two dozen school districts, including Rochester, Stewardson-Strasburg and DuQuoin have been waiting since 2003 for the state's promised share of construction costs. In dollars, that's 148 million promises the state hasn't kept. Another 250 districts have applied to the State Board of Education for help — should funds be available again.

It's true, the state has been hard-pressed of late just to make ends meet.

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Still, in the past two years, funding to rebuild Illinois schools has foundered on partisan bickering between lawmakers and the governor over possible revenue sources — while, somehow, the dollars have been found for other projects and priorities.

This month, when the legislature convenes its fall veto session, state politicians may peer again into the empty school construction account.

In the meantime, consider this: The crumbling commitment to ensure that Illinois children have safe places to learn represents merely the most visible tip of the broken promise. If the state owes each Illinois child the best possible education, then safe, clean and pleasant classrooms amount to the first payment on that promissory note, and the easiest. It gets a whole lot harder from there.

The larger promise is to ensure adequate and equitable spending on each child's education. Yet, despite pumping millions into school funding over the years — including $325 million in new money for this budget — Illinois has yet to come up with what many school finance experts consider adequate per pupil spending. And, with its over-reliance on local property taxes to finance education, this state is among the worst in the nation in spending disparity between property-rich and property-poor districts. This gap between the lowest-spending and the highest-spending districts stretches from $4,440 to $23,800 per student. It's hard to imagine that the children who go to these respective schools receive anything resembling an equal education.

The difference is wealth. And, increasingly, it is race. Researchers for The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University raised concerns about the connection between concentration of poverty and a trend toward resegregation of the nation's schools, 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled children have a right to an equal opportunity for a good education.

As we reported last year (see May 2004), the report issued by the project rated this state among the top four with the most-segregated school systems. In Illinois, authors Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee wrote, "61 percent of black students and 40 percent of Latinos were in 'intensely segregated schools.'"

No matter the excuse, the failure to redeem this larger promise is political, too, not financial.

Writer Jonathan Kozol makes such connections. He has been talking and listening to children in inner-city schools for more than 40 years. In *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, published in 1991, Kozol visited classrooms in Chicago and East St. Louis, districts home to high poverty rates and large numbers of racial minorities. Each is on the state's construction list for $29 million in assistance.

Kozol's description of East St. Louis High is memorable. The school's heating system didn't work, leaving some rooms cold and others sweltering — and making teaching and learning difficult at best.

In Kozol's most recent book, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, published last month, Kozol returns to what he calls "bleak and unhappy" schools, including some in Chicago. He finds the "disrepair and overcrowding were familiar still in many districts."

But the children, he notes, have no political agendas.

Among the letters he received from the many children he has met is this one from Elizabeth: "It is not fair that other kids have a garden and new things. But we don't have that. I wish that this school was the most beautiful school in the whole why world."

What does a sewer back-up have to do with education? It is an apt metaphor for the decision to ignore our most basic promise to Illinois' children. ❑

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.

Illinois Issues

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October 2005 *Volume XXXI, No. 10*



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The state promised millions for school construction projects. But the money hasn't gone out. Now local taxpayers are stuck with the bills.

Credits: *The photograph on this month's cover comes to us courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

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Illinois politics mire minor league baseball in mud

by Pat Guinane

Forget Mudville. There is joy in Marion.

After pairing with private investors, the southern Illinois town is poised to become the state's latest home to minor league baseball.

"We're willing to go to bat to help the development of this because we feel it will be a tremendous shot in the arm, not just for the city of Marion, but for the entire area," says Marion Mayor Bob Butler. "We've got a lot of rabid baseball fans in the area. It's amazing. I can go to the grocery store and little gray-haired old ladies will ask, 'Where do I get a season ticket?'"

Optimism is abundant in Marion as the locals look to minor league baseball for an economic boost. By one estimate, a new stadium can bring the area an additional $4 million a year.

But before the project even got off the ground, it was mired in political mud. For Illinois, that's certainly nothing new.

The intersection of sports and politics, is as time-tested as Yankee pinstripes. In 1986, state lawmakers steered $167 million, mostly from a tax on Chicago hotels, to construction of a new stadium for the Chicago White Sox. In 2000, lawmakers tapped the same tax for $387 million. That picked up most of the cost of squeezing a modern stadium into the historic colonnades of Soldier Field.

That didn't stop Andy McKenna, chairman of the Illinois GOP, from crying foul when Gov. Rod Blagojevich set aside a $3 million state grant to help build a minor league baseball stadium in Marion. McKenna called for an investigation because lead investor John Simmons and his Metro East law firm have given nearly $30,000 to Blagojevich's campaign fund.

The intersection of sports and politics is as time-tested as Yankee pinstripes.

McKenna couldn't get a prosecutor to take up the case. Instead, the local state's attorney invited McKenna to come enjoy a heaping helping of "southern Illinois crow" when the Marion ballpark opens.

Supporters say the state will see a return on its investment. They have reason for confidence. A few years ago, the state pitched in $1 million to build a Metro East home for the Gateway Grizzlies of the independent Frontier League. Club officials figure taxes on team revenues have repaid the state's seed money. After all, the Sauget stadium has led the Frontier League in attendance three straight years, even packing in a record 7,917 fans for this year's season finale.

And it wasn't the first time state money went to stadium construction.

In 1997, former state Sen. Patrick O'Malley, a Palos Park Republican, secured a $700,000 grant to help Crestwood build a home for the Cook County Cheetahs.

"The village of Crestwood came to me and requested assistance," he says. "Our caucus discussed it and decided that they thought it was a very prudent way for us to assist a local municipality." The village, as O'Malley points out, financed more than 90 percent of the project.

Today, six years after the $8 million stadium opened, Crestwood Mayor Chester Stranczek still considers the park a prudent investment. "It will take a number of years to get our $8 million back, but that wasn't the reason that we did it. It's an economic benefit to the community."

For a short time after leaving the legislature, O'Malley was part of an ownership group that gave the club its current name, the Windy City Thunderbolts. He says he sold his interest more than a year ago. Stranczek's son, however, owns a third of the team, the mayor says.

In addition to ticket and concession sales, Marion officials see a new stadium as a major attraction, one that will have visitors plunking down additional dollars at local shops, restaurants and hotels.

While much farther from a major metropolitan area than Crestwood or Sauget, research shows a Marion ballpark could attract at least 2,600 fans per game, says Dennis Poshard, who headed the grassroots campaign for southern Illinois baseball and now works for Simmons.

The $16 million stadium will have about 4,000 seats. Picnic areas and an outfield berm should boost capacity to 6,000 or more, says Poshard, the son of former U.S. Rep. Glenn Poshard. The goal is to provide inexpensive family entertainment. Most minor league parks charge about $10 for the best seats in the house. Tickets to Major League Baseball games start at two or three times that.

To help finance the park, Marion has raised the local sales tax by an eighth of a percent. Mayor Butler says the hike should generate $400,000 a year, enough to cover about 40 percent of the stadium debt.

Private financing covered nearly 70 percent of Peoria's new ballpark. Opened in 2002, O'Brien Field was built for $23 million. The home of the Peoria Chiefs — currently a Class A affiliate of the Chicago Cubs — can hold 7,500 fans.

While new stadiums have proved to be fan magnets, the question for Marion is: What team will the fans be lining up to see?

"There's no doubt that southern Illinois is a St. Louis Cardinals' market," Poshard says. "If we wound up, down the road, being a Cardinal franchise or a Cub franchise or something that local people could kind of identify with, that would obviously be better than winding up with the Florida Marlins or something like that, no aspersions toward those other teams."

Mayor Butler agrees. "It would be a tremendous thing if at some point in time they could become affiliated with the St. Louis Cardinals," he says. "That would be the icing on the cake."

The Kane County Cougars have done well hosting far-flung Class A affiliates, first the Florida Marlins and now the Oakland Athletics. Before catering to the Cubs, the Peoria Chiefs — the state's only other affiliated minor league club — had hosted a St. Louis Cardinals' Class A team.

The Cardinals currently have three Class A affiliates. The big-league club owns the Palm Beach County [Fla.] Cardinals. The team has one year left on an affiliate deal with the New Jersey Cardinals of Augusta, N.J., says Bruce Manno, director of player development for the St. Louis Cardinals. And the team also has three years left on a four-year contract with the Swing of the Quad Cities, which plays in Davenport, Iowa. "We're very happy in the Quad Cities," Manno says, declining to discuss the odds of a St. Louis franchise moving to Marion.

It's these sorts of rumblings that Marion must prepare for if it plans to treat baseball as an economic engine. There will always be some city willing to build a new ballpark for a nomadic team.

The stadium will be built to meet Major League Baseball requirements for a Class A team, which means fans will see players who could be on big-league clubs within a few years. Simmons' ownership group purchased the Savannah [Ga.] Sand Gnats last winter and has reached an agreement to purchase the South Bend [Ind.] Silver Hawks. Those teams are Class A affiliates of the Washington Nationals and the Arizona Diamondbacks, respectively.

While excitement is brewing in Marion, the town could take a lesson from Springfield. The capital city never built a new ballpark for minor league baseball, but in the 1970s it made renovations to Lanphier Park in preparation for it.

The Springfield Redbirds were as good at it gets. Not only were they affiliated with a local team — the St. Louis Cardinals — the Redbirds also were a Triple A club, the highest caliber of minor league baseball. All summer, Springfield fans could watch players that were only a phone call away from performing in the big leagues.

But the Redbirds left for Louisville, Ky., after just four seasons. They were replaced by the Springfield Cardinals, a Class A affiliate of the big-league club. The team played a dozen seasons at Lanphier Park. But crowds had dwindled to roughly 1,200 per game by 1993, the Cardinals' rain-soaked final season in Springfield. They left for Madison, Wis. But minor league baseball would slide further in Springfield before slipping out of town altogether.

First came the Class A Sultans, who played one season as a San Diego Padres' affiliate and another under the Kansas City Royals' organization. The crowds continued to shrink, and Lanphier Park was showing its age. The Sultans were lured to a new stadium in Lansing, Mich.

The owner of the now Lansing Lugnuts wants that city to soften its current stadium lease. It's these sorts of rumblings that Marion must prepare for if it plans to treat baseball as an economic engine. There will always be some city willing to build a new ballpark for a nomadic team. The Chicago White Sox, for instance, used St. Petersburg, Fla., to leverage its new stadium from the Illinois legislature.

Even the last futile incarnation of minor league baseball in Springfield — the Capitals of the Frontier League — left for Rockford three years ago with the promise of a new ballpark. The Rockford RiverHawks move into their new stadium next year.

Marion has a lot riding on minor league baseball. The 30-acre ballpark will anchor a 120-acre development near Interstate 57 and Illinois Route 13. A Marriott hotel chain, a local bank and the Menards chain of hardware superstores already have construction plans, Mayor Butler says.

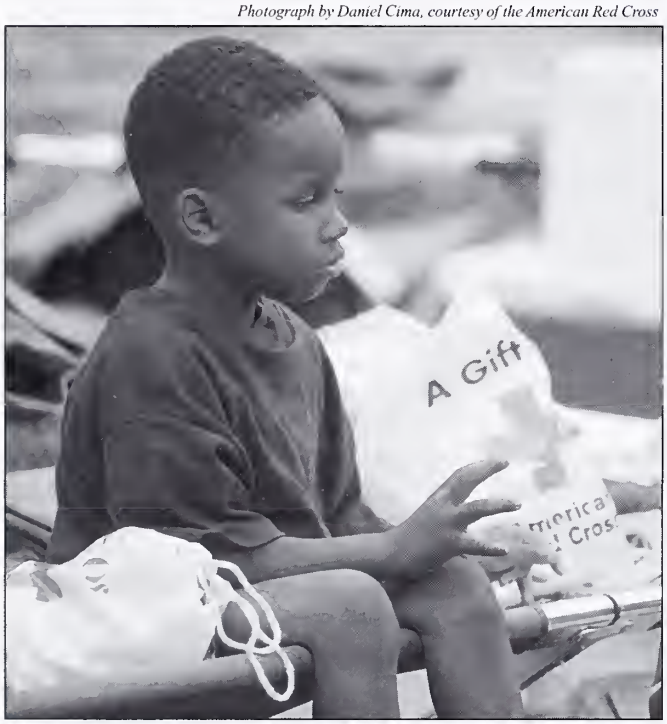
Marion didn't want to operate the stadium itself, the underlying theory being that a privately owned stadium is less likely to sit empty if shifts in the minor league baseball world lure a team away. That's some reassuring logic because even new stadiums eventually grow old. Springfield's experience offers a cautionary tale. Much like mighty Casey, a town can strike out trying to support minor league baseball. ❑

Pat Guinane can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

HURRICANE KATRINA
Illinois responds

Photograph by Daniel Cima, courtesy of the American Red Cross



Hurricane Katrina evacuees from Louisiana found a temporary home at the Houston Astrodome, which was lined with rows of cots.

Photograph courtesy of state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka's office



State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka helped load donated pet supplies. Some of her staff members drove them down to Louisiana on vacation time.

Illinois made plans to accept up to 10,000 evacuees of Hurricane Katrina, while opening state schools to displaced children and sending support personnel to help devastated Gulf Coast states stabilize and rebuild after the deadly late-August storm.

Two weeks after Katrina made landfall and overpowered Louisiana levees, the Federal Emergency Management Agency flew about 430 evacuees to Illinois. From Louisiana, they flew into airports in Chicago, the Metro East and Rockford. Most arrivals were given shelter at state mental health centers in Alton, Elgin and Tinley Park. The American Red Cross also was providing housing. It is estimated that more than 6,000 other evacuees made their own way to Illinois.

"We're continuing to work day and night to find every possible way to help our fellow Americans in the Gulf Coast states as they struggle to survive and recover from this horrific disaster," Gov. Rod Blagojevich said in a printed statement.

The governor ordered the state's elementary and high schools to waive residency requirements for children staying with relatives or in Illinois shelters.

"The great migration of African Americans after the two world wars meant that a lot of families from the southern states, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, came up to the Chicagoland area. So I suspect we will get a lot of takers," Blagojevich told MSNBC's Chris Matthews.

By mid-September, the state had placed more than 400 children in 46

Photograph by Harvey Tillis, courtesy of the Illinois Information Service



Evacuees in need of medical attention were taken to the House of Hope church on Chicago's South Side once they arrived in Illinois.

Photograph by Karen Hoyt, courtesy of the Illinois Information Service



New Orleanians forced from their homes by the devastating hurricane and flood arrived at O'Hare International Airport last month.

Photograph by Brent Hanson, courtesy of the Illinois Information Service



Volunteers from Illinois' Central Management Services department load satellite Internet trailers to bolster battered communications in New Orleans.

school districts, according to the State Board of Education.

In addition, the state's 48 community colleges and 12 public universities planned to accept displaced students. The University of Illinois is allowing affected students to enroll this year at any of its three campuses or sign up for online courses.

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is underwriting a free, accelerated eight-week online curriculum for about 10,000 students under a national initiative conceived by Burks Oakley, director of U of I online programs, and Ray Schroeder, director of Technology-Enhanced Learning at the University of Illinois at Springfield. UIS is a member of the Sloan Consortium, a group of more than 200 colleges and universities that will administer the online program. Courses will begin October 10. More information is available at *www.sloansemester.org*.

Meanwhile, the state deployed 800 Illinois National Guard troops and 269 Guard vehicles to Louisiana. And, through the activation of a statewide mutual assistance network, the state sent nearly 600 firefighters on a two-week mission to support colleagues in New Orleans.

A group of 134 state and local law enforcement officers also was temporarily dispatched. Fifty-two members of the Illinois Medical Emergency Response Team spent about a week at a temporary hospital at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge.

In mid-September, Illinois sent a group of 100 state employees, mostly clerical workers, to assist the Louisiana Department of Social Services.

The Illinois departments of Corrections, Employment Security and Public Health assisted Gulf Coast counterparts, as did the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. The state Department of Human Services also helped federal authorities with a Disaster Food Stamp program in 25 Louisiana counties. And the Department of Central Management Services provided relief command centers with uplinks for phone and Internet access.

Illinois established a toll-free number — 1-800-843-6154 — to connect displaced Gulf Coast residents with state services, including food stamps, housing, child care, public school enrollment and unemployment benefits.

By mid-September, the state had spent an estimated $18 million caring for evacuees and deploying support personnel to Gulf Coast states. Officials say the federal government should reimburse Illinois for nearly all expenses. On September 7, Illinois became the 18th state to receive a federal emergency declaration, which made federal assistance available to state and local entities in all 102 counties retroactive to August 29, the day Katrina made landfall.

Pat Guinane

Photograph by Karen Hoyt, courtesy of the Illinois Information Service



Gov. Rod Blagojevich visited Louisiana Hurricane Katrina evacuees, who found a temporary home in Elgin at a state mental health center.

Photograph by Brent Hanson, courtesy of the Illinois Information Service



Central Management Services workers register at the Exhibition Building at the state fairgrounds for volunteer duties in the hurricane relief effort.

FAIR HOUSING CHARGES
Arlington track cited

Arlington Park Racecourse violated the Fair Housing Act by relegating workers with children to cramped housing without plumbing or air conditioning, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development charges. Workers without children had access to air-conditioned quarters with water.

"It made it very tough on them, especially if they had very little children. For children in diapers — really for anything — there was no running water whatsoever," says Bernard Kleina, the executive director of the private Wheaton-based HOPE Fair Housing Center, whose complaint launched the HUD investigation.

HUD charged Arlington Park Racecourse LLC, a subsidiary of Churchill Downs Inc., with setting terms and conditions of housing based on familial status and other violations of the Fair Housing Act. The issue involves hundreds of trainers' workers who live in backstretch dorms.

Cliff Goodrich, Arlington Park president, stated in a prepared release that safety determines where families live. Living in the air-conditioned dorms with plumbing "would place children perilously close to the high-strung thoroughbreds and large mechanical vehicles utilized to transport horses, deliver hay and straw, and remove manure." Kleina says communal bathrooms outside the dorms are a safety risk, too.

Meanwhile, he says he has also filed a complaint against the Village of Arlington Heights. "If this housing were located anywhere else in Arlington Heights, they would be condemned. There shouldn't be a double standard because these families are poor and primarily Latino."

But Arlington Heights Mayor Arlene Mulder says, "Both our building and health departments have done everything they could legally. We have looked at every angle." Mulder says the village would need to apply new standards to all older buildings, not just those at the track.

Following the HOPE center's 2003 complaints, the track built more units, but families with children remained in dorms that had no running water.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

COLLECTION SCAM
State seeks to recover

The state is trying to recoup a $75,000 grant it gave to a Rockford collection agency later declared a scam operation by federal regulators.

In March 2004, Capital Acquisitions and Management Corp, or CAMCO, paid $300,000 to settle a federal complaint that accused the company of threatening thousands of consumers who had debts too old to be enforced or who never owed money in the first place.

A month later, Gov. Rod Blagojevich's Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity gave the company $75,000 to train 150 new employees.

"This grant was part of an agreement that was made by the previous administration and, because of the way that agreement was structured, the fine that the company paid did not violate those terms, so the grant was executed," says department spokesman Andrew Ross. "But this is an example of why greater corporate accountability is required."

A federal court shut down CAMCO in December 2004. In the eight months after the settlement, the company had racked up more than 2,000 new consumer complaints. Up to 80 percent of CAMCO's collections were bogus, according to the Federal Trade Commission, but the company pried payments from consumers by threatening to "hound you 'til the day you die."

Prior to those allegations, former Gov. George Ryan awarded CAMCO $3.7 million in tax credits over 10 years and gave the company $500,000 to purchase its Rockford headquarters. Ross says the additional $75,000 grant was tied to that package.

CAMCO never received any of the $3.7 million in tax credits, Ross says. The state has ordered CAMCO to return the $575,000 in grants, with the Illinois attorney general's office filing a claim in federal court.

The state also has asked American Trans Air and Winstrom, a Toluca window manufacturer, to return grant money as part of a corporate accountability law Blagojevich signed in 2003.

ATA, which filed for bankruptcy protection last year, is being asked to return $4.6 million in state subsidies. The Blagojevich Administration wants back $857,758 it gave the airline last year to add 168 new jobs at Chicago's Midway Airport. The state also wants ATA to return nearly $3.75 million in infrastructure grants awarded while Ryan was governor.

Winstrom, the window manufacturer, received a $27,000 job training grant in 2004, but failed to meet its promise of 24 additional hires.

These are the first collection efforts initiated under the 2003 Corporate Accountability for Tax Expenditures Act. The law requires the state to seek refunds from companies that fail to uphold job creation pledges that accompany state subsidies.

A new state Web site offers progress reports for dozens of firms that are complying with the corporate accountability law. But the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity would not identify the three companies that weren't complying until *Illinois Issues* filed a request under the state's public records law.

Ross says the department has met disclosure requirements under the corporate accountability law, which does not require the state to post the names of companies that have failed to meet job creation pledges.

The law was sponsored by Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock Democrat.

"I'm very happy that it's working as it's intended," he says. "I'm also happy to see that DCEO is following up with these companies that haven't lived up to their obligations, because the reason we passed this law was to protect the taxpayers."

Franks' region of the state lost about 5,000 jobs when Motorola closed its Harvard cell phone manufacturing plant in 2003. The company was lured there a decade earlier by $36 million in state assistance.

Franks says he'll introduce legislation in January that would require the department to post the names of violators.

Pat Guinane

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at http://illinoisissues.uis.edu



THE CHIEF
NCAA ruling may force a decision

The University of Illinois Board of Trustees has until February 1 to appeal an August ruling by the NCAA that could affect nearly 90 sports, including tennis, gymnastics and women's basketball.

The new policy would bar schools that use "hostile and abusive racial/ethnic/national origin mascots, nicknames or imagery" from hosting postseason tournament play. The University of Illinois was one of 18 schools, including Bradley University in Peoria, listed as being in violation of the policy.

Florida State University in Tallahassee appealed immediately, and the NCAA ruled that university could continue to use its mascot, the Seminoles, because of backing from the tribe. Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant and the University of Utah in Salt Lake City also won appeals to keep their mascots, the Chippewas and Utes, respectively.

"That shows [NCAA officials] are open-minded to fact-based arguments," says Thomas Hardy, executive director of university relations at the University of Illinois.

The U of I's flagship campus at Urbana-Champaign has been involved in controversy over its mascot, Chief Illiniwek, and its nickname, the Fighting Illini, for more than two decades. Native American groups say the images are insulting and demeaning and do not represent their cultures. Supporters argue tradition.

The Chief will continue to perform at football games in the fall and at basketball games, says Hardy, because neither sport is affected by the policy. Football postseason play is determined by the Bowl Championship Series rules, and Illinois doesn't have the facilities to host a postseason regional basketball game leading up to the Final Four tournament, which is always played on neutral ground.

However, last year the university did host the postseason gymnastics competition. The tennis team, which won the title in 2003, has hosted opening rounds of NCAA tournament play.

Hosting the postseason tournaments "brings a level of elite competition and prestige to the campus and economic activity to the campus and the community," says Hardy.

Opponents of the Native American imagery embodied in the buckskin-clad Chief, who first took to the field in 1926, say that the NCAA ruling is an opportunity for the university board of trustees "to do the right thing."

Photographs courtesy of Illinois Sports Information



"You cannot stand for an academic curricular level, for high standards of integrity, learning, investigation — all of those things that get attached to liberal arts and the advancement of humanity through education, and then have the Chief as the thing you're known for," says Don Messec, a member of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media. He and his wife, artist Charlene Teters, registered some of the earliest complaints about the university's promotion of a racist image as its mascot when they were students in the 1980s.

"It has to be the thing you were known for. To stand for all those things, you actually have to kill it for all the right reasons, and stand there and be proud you did it for the right reasons." *Beverley Scobell*

Legislative caucus focuses on history

The success of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in drawing tourists to the state — more than 340,000 in the first five months — has renewed legislative interest in historic preservation.

A new Historic Preservation Caucus, spearheaded by Democratic Rep. Thomas Holbrook of Belleville, will meet during the session that starts this month. So far, the caucus is comprised of 41 representatives and 17 senators, including the four leaders.

Holbrook says the Lincoln museum shows the positive effect a historic site can have on a community's economy. "I'm sure that piqued [legislators'] interest, but there's been quite a bit of interest all along. This is the first effort to organize that interest at the legislative level that I'm aware of."

Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson says he believes there is growing legislative support to fund historic preservation. "I feel very optimistic about this. I think people are recognizing the need for more emphasis on our history and for preserving it."

The caucus will work with nonprofit organizations and state agencies to review policies, set priorities and find funding in tight budgetary times.

The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois will be one of the groups working with the new caucus to help raise awareness and promote funding for preservation programs.

Keeping historic sites operational and maintained is one of the goals of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, says David Bahlman, executive director. But also, he would like to see restored a $500,000 annual state grant for historic buildings and archaeological sites that ended under former Gov. George Ryan.

"We realize funded initiatives are not terribly attainable right now with the state budget and the shape it is in," Bahlman says. "But, there are a lot of other initiatives that don't require funding that we'll be investigating."

Holbrook says most legislators know the importance of staying connected to the state's past, and every district has a piece of it. Cahokia Mounds, the only United Nations World Heritage Site in Illinois, and many of the state's first homes are in his district.

Beverley Scobell

GOVERNOR'S ACTION

Medical malpractice

Setting aside personal opposition, Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed legislation limiting injured patients' ability to recover legal damages from doctors and hospitals. While expected, the move intensified, rather than quelled, conflict over the politically charged medical malpractice debate.

"With so much at stake, we cannot think that just because we passed this bill, our work is done," Blagojevich said in a statement expressing his desire for further regulation of the medical insurance industry.

The governor echoed the sentiment of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, which, in addition to seeking more insurance reforms, argues the new law "improperly takes away the jury's ability to hold negligent doctors and hospitals fully accountable."

The malpractice law, enacted in late August, does not limit awards for economic damages, such as lost wages. Noneconomic damages, including pain and suffering, are capped at $500,000 for doctors and $1 million for suits against hospitals.

Once the courts begin to cap patient awards, trial lawyers are expected to select a case they can challenge all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court.

In 1997, the court ruled unconstitutional caps on noneconomic damages in all lawsuits. The court said the legislature had improperly abridged judicial authority to limit excessive jury awards. It also ruled that lawmakers had crafted special legislation unfairly limiting only one type of compensation. It was the second time the court rejected caps.

The current Supreme Court, however, includes only two justices who decided the 1997 case. In fact, medical liability caps were the rallying cry that helped Republican Lloyd Karmeier win last year's race to represent southern Illinois on the state's high court.

Graduation standards

High school students will be required to take an extra year of English, math and science by 2012 under stricter graduation standards Gov. Blagojevich enacted in late August. The new curriculum also mandates two writing-intensive courses. Blagojevich says the current state budget includes $8 million to help schools begin implementing the new requirements.

Pat Guinane

Pension fund probe reaches high ranks

Gov. Rod Blagojevich says he wasn't involved in an alleged state pension fund extortion scheme that snared two political insiders.

Joseph Cari, a former finance chairman of the Democratic National Committee, admitted attempting to extort firms seeking investments from the state Teachers' Retirement System. Cari's plea agreement outlines a fundraising strategy involving the pension fund that was intended to benefit a high-ranking person in state government identified only as "Public Official A."

"I don't know who A, B, C or Z is," Blagojevich told reporters at an unrelated news conference the day after the deal was made public. "All I can tell you is what was written in that document does not describe how we do things. We don't operate that way. No one who is associated with me operates that way, and if they did, they understand I wouldn't tolerate that for a split second."

Steven Loren, formerly an outside attorney for the teachers pension fund, was the second individual to admit participation in the extortion scheme.

The probe centers on former pension fund trustee Stuart Levine, a top Republican fundraiser.

Blagojevich aides told reporters federal investigators have not questioned the governor about the pension fund.

ENDANGERED LANDMARKS
Group releases '05 Chicagoland list

The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois last month released its Chicagoland Watch List for 2005-06, which included 12 sites. The annual list, a complement to the organization's "Ten Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois" announcement, calls attention to issues that have put buildings with historic significance at risk. Problems include vacancy, maintenance needs and what the council calls "questionable redevelopment plans." The top 10 list is released each year in March.

Photograph courtesy of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois



The Christ Episcopal Church and its parsonage is located at 75 W. Van Buren St. in Joliet.

Photograph by Brian Palm



The Cermak Road Bridge District is roughly situated between Grove and Jefferson streets in Chicago.

Photograph courtesy of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois



Chicago's Union Station is at Jackson and Canal.

Photograph courtesy of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois



Chicago's Main Post Office building is located at the Congress Expressway and Canal Street.

Photograph courtesy of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois



The Civic Center in Evanston is at 2100 Ridge Ave.

GREEN ROOTS ACTION
Illinois mayors back climate agreement

As of late September, four Illinois mayors, including Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, had accepted the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, an accord to help curb global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions on a city-by-city basis.

The initiative, launched by Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels on the day in February that the Kyoto Protocol took effect, challenges mayors to "meet or beat" the protocol's goals within their own cities.

The Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty that requires industrialized countries to cut their emissions of carbon dioxide and five other climate-changing gases, was rejected by President George W. Bush's administration.

"It's inevitable that we'll need to take action on greenhouse gases," Nickels said in a prepared release. "The longer we wait, the more draconian those measures will have to be."

The Climate Protection Agreement, a "good-faith" accord, does not set specific deadlines or requirements for cities that sign it. But, citing recent evidence of dangerous climate change such as rising sea levels and record heat waves, the agreement suggests promoting transportation options and sustainable building practices, improving recycling rates and advocating the development of alternative energies.

It also asks cities to urge the state and federal governments to enact policies on a larger scale.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors unanimously passed the agreement in June. By late September, 179 mayors, including those of New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., had joined the bipartisan effort. Collectively, they represent nearly 40 million constituents.

"The coalition is growing, and momentum is building," Nickels said. "Dozens of cities from all parts of the country are now working to tackle climate disruption. That will make a big difference in the local quality of life and for global warming."

The Chicago suburbs of Carol Stream, Highland Park and Schaumburg also have signed the agreement.

Vera Leopold

RACE REPORTS

Driver profiling

Minority drivers on Illinois roads were 2.6 times more likely to face consent searches of their vehicles last year, and more likely to get tickets, according to a study of traffic stops statewide.

Overall, police stopped minority drivers only slightly more often than white drivers, according to the study produced earlier this year by the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety. In almost half of the police agencies reporting, white drivers were stopped more often than minorities. But a few agencies — including police in Irvington, Monticello, Rushville and Toluca and sheriff departments in Jefferson, Piatt, Schuyler and Scott counties — stopped minorities 10 times more often than whites, *Illinois Issues*' analysis showed.

The public safety center's report was issued in response to a law that between 2004 and 2007 requires yearly collection and analysis of traffic stop statistics. All but about 50 of the more than 1,000 law enforcement agencies reported. Information was collected from agencies at the state, municipal and county levels, as well as campus and transportation police. Some of those reporting disputed findings for their departments.

Large agencies, including police departments in Chicago and East St. Louis and the Illinois State Police, were not among those in which the numbers showed a propensity for profiling.

Achievement gap

A narrowing disparity in educational achievement between African Americans and whites has stalled, reports a University of Chicago economics professor whose study titled "Why Has Black-White Skill Convergence Stopped?" is expected to be be published later this year.

Derek Neal looked at such data as U.S. Census reports and standardized test scores, and contends that the educational attainment gap between young white and black adults consistently fell between 1940 and 1990, but has not continued to close since. For instance, graduation rates among 21-year-old black males dropped since the mid-1980s, as rates for white males in that age group rose.



PUMPKIN SEASON

The drought may have cut yields for growers of jack-o-lantern pumpkins by as much as 15 percent in some northern Illinois fields, according to University of Illinois Extension specialists. But Illinois will harvest enough to keep its status as the top U.S. pumpkin producer.

QUOTABLE

"The basic question is this: Will you restrict the personal freedoms we enjoy as Americans or will you expand them?"

U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin of Illinois to Judge John Roberts during the Senate Judiciary Committee's questioning of President George W. Bush's nominee as chief justice of the Supreme Court. Durbin's comments were reported in The New York Times.

CONTRACT WATCH
Property management

A deposed state contractor wants the job back, arguing that Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration improperly caved under a deluge of media criticism.

Illinois Property Asset Management lost its $30 million contract in May, shortly after a state audit showed the Chicago consulting firm stuck taxpayers with $31,000 in questionable expenses, including candy, alcohol and parking at a Chicago Bulls game. In the days after the audit, Blagojevich defended the company. But he canceled the contract in early May.

Now, Illinois Property Asset Management is using that reversal as the linchpin for a breach of contract lawsuit filed in late August in Cook County Circuit Court. Blagojevich blamed the dismissal on the questionable expenses, which were approved by his Department of Central Management Services, or CMS. Illinois Property Asset Management argues the state could have easily recovered those expenses and that "the true reason for the purported termination was the media criticism resulting from the auditor general's report." The two sides also are fighting over work products that CMS says the firm should turn over to the state.

Meanwhile, in a separate suit, Illinois Property Asset Management wants the state to pay $13,500 for expenses it submitted to CMS after the 2004 state budget year had expired. By then, the firm had begun weighing expenses against state reimbursement rules. Pricey meals, for example, were scratched off or cut to $17, the top allowance for traveling state workers. The expenses were for subcontractors working with Illinois Property Asset Management. Their bill includes a $191.37 receipt from Amazon.com for two books: *Facility Manager's Operation and Maintenance Handbook* by Bernard T. Lewis and *The Facility Management Handbook* by David G. Cotts.

In December 2003, the state gave Illinois Property Asset Management a $24.9 million contract to reform state property management practices. No-bid contract amendments later hiked the deal by $5.75 million. The suit over the $13,500 in expenses was filed in March at the Illinois Court of Claims.

Pat Guinane

HEALTH INSURANCE
by the numbers for 2005

9.2 percent increase in premiums

3 times higher hike than workers' salaries

60 percent of firms offer coverage

9 percent fewer offer it than in 2000

20 percent offer plans with at least a $2,000 deductible for family coverage

$10,880 is the average family premium

$10,712 is gross pay at minimum wage

3 percent get conventional coverage

3.9 million children are covered by state's Children's Health Insurance Coverage

25,000 new children joined in 2004

35 states saw SCHIP enrollment climb

33 percent more joined in Illinois

SOURCE: *The 2005 Employer Health Benefits Survey by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Kaiser Committee on Medicaid and the Uninsured*



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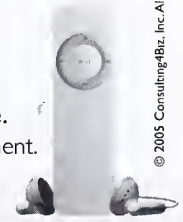
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Coming or going

Comfortable and reliable passenger trains used to run in Illinois, and they might once again, if Congress quits arguing about Amtrak and starts thinking about trains

Essay by James Krohe Jr.

Photographs courtesy of the Library of Congress



A traveler's mind can drift when she's sitting on the siding outside Dwight, waiting for a freight train to pass while the meeting she was supposed to attend in Chicago begins without her. She might daydream of the Amtrak board of directors, trapped aboard the *Ann Rutledge* because of "signal problems," pummeling each other over the last three chicken salad sandwiches in the Amcafe. But more often, she dreams of a comfortable and reliable passenger train that runs often and on time.

Such trains used to run in Illinois, by the hundreds, and they might again, if Congress ever quits arguing about Amtrak and starts thinking about trains.

Illinois still has more miles of track than any other state, but what survives is a fraction of the system — 25,000 miles in 1935 — that made a rail map of Illinois look like a cracked table platter. The railroads could run in all weather, across terrain that stymied other land vehicles. They were faster than canals, more comfortable than stagecoaches and went more places than steamboats. Until well into the 1920s, when Illinoisans went anywhere much beyond the county seat, they went on a train. Cross-country main lines made some local stops. Branch lines spread into the countryside.

Chicago, meanwhile, *was* railroads, blacked by their smoke, strangled by their tracks, deafened by their noise and made rich by the commerce they carried. Once, 33 main interstate lines ran into Chicago. Merely noting the names of the great passenger trains that ran in and out of that city — the Santa Fe's *Super Chief*, the New York Central's *20th Century Limited*, the Pennsylvania's *Broadway Limited* — makes a rail buff go misty. Trains from across the continent met and exchanged passengers at no fewer than six depots downtown, each a fabled waystation in millions of journeys.

Downstate, trains are remembered fondly by most people who used them, less because of the trains than because of their association with the things they carried people to: funerals, that first exciting trip to Chicago, the child's visit to grandma with her name pinned to her dress, going away to college. That elegiac note is sounded sweetly in Cary Clive Burford's "The Twilight of the Local Passenger



Passengers await the Zephyr *in East Dubuque, circa 1940.*

Train in Illinois," which appears in Robert Sutton's *The Prairie State: A Documentary History of Illinois*. Burford recalled that in Farmer City a hundred gathered each day to meet the 4:38. The small town may have made going anywhere else in the United States desirable, but it was the railroads that made it possible.

Of course, when better ways of doing that were on offer, travelers turned their backs on trains. As David Young reminds us in his new book, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City: How Railroads Shaped Chicago*, intercity passenger rail was sickly as early as World War I, having been choked for years by state and federal regulators and starved by its own managers. It was further weakened by the short-lived but hurtful competition from interurbans on rural routes and, later, by the downturn in business travel caused by the Depression.

Most accounts of the demise of intercity rail insist that by the time the automobile and the airplane came along, rail was in no shape to fight them off. But intercity passenger rail did not just die. It was killed.

As late as the 1930s, automobile travel had eroded the railroads' market only slightly. The car offered undeniable advantages — privacy and the flexibility to go places where and when trains did not. But, while cars made many trips possible, they were still far from convenient, thanks to Illinois' famously bad roads. When Illinois finally fixed its roads, beginning in the 1920s, it loosened the spikes on its passenger rails.

It was not, in other words, the car that killed the passenger train, but the highway. The new roads, specifically the early "superhighways" that evolved into the Interstate Highway System, made intercity car travel fast enough and pleasant enough to be a viable alternative to trains. Just as important from an economic point of view, the interstates opened up the nation to the long-distance freight-hauling truck, which took a revenue stream that had subsidized the railroads' passenger operations.

So it is useful to recall, while staring out the train window at cars on I-55 as they outpace rail travelers headed to Chicago, that cars today are easy and cheap to use because government has spent billions to make them so, and trains are not convenient to use because government has not spent billions to make them so.

This is not the case in much of Europe and Asia. The Chicago-to-Springfield Amtrak ambles along at an average speed of 56 mph; a traveler can ride from Madrid to Cordoba at an average speed of 120 mph. The French TGV zips along at nearly 140 mph, and Japan's bullet trains, which run at more than 160 mph, would put Chicago's Loop less than two hours from St. Louis.

The sensibleness of such a rail web in our part of the Midwest is manifest. Several of the country's biggest cities stand within 500 miles or so of Chicago. These distances are too long to drive conveniently, and not quite long enough to justify the hassle of flying. Intercity trips of such length are admirably served by high-speed trains. Many of those trips are now being made by air. A trip to Cleveland from Chicago takes only 50 minutes in the air but requires two hours of hassle at each end, not counting the time it takes to get lost on the way to the airports; a "supertrain" could cover that distance with time to spare, and deliver riders downtown to boot. The Japanese bullet train that links Sapporo and Hakodate covers 200 miles in three hours and stole the market for air service between the two cities. When France opened its first TGV line between Paris and Lyon in the early 1980s, the nation's domestic airline had to cut back on its service because the TGV was faster than flying. Eurostar, operator of the "chunnel" trains, carries some two-thirds of the people who travel back and forth between London and Paris.

For a time in the 1990s, it looked as if Illinois rail passengers might catch up with their counterparts abroad. The St. Louis-Chicago corridor was designated by the feds as one of several high-speed rail corridors that would make up a nine-state Chicago-based regional network of such trains. The Springfield to Joliet segment has been undergoing extensive track rehabilitation. Its owner, the Union Pacific Railroad, has been resurfacing worn, made-in-1957 rails so that riding a train on them won't feel like riding a skateboard down a gravel road. That section also is getting upgraded

Illinois knows how to re-invent the passenger train

Some historians complain that railroad management is mostly to blame for the commercial demise of passenger rail. They failed to innovate in the face of competition from the car, it is said, or they innovated too late, or they innovated ineffectively.

Yet some did try, and several of those experiments in re-inventing the passenger train took place in Illinois. In fact, what is heralded as railroading's future elsewhere is in some ways a throwback to Illinois' past.

Illinois railroads always sold speed. Better track and more powerful locomotives gradually conquered Illinois' distances. Transportation historian David Young notes that the first passenger trains run by the Illinois Central through eastern and southern Illinois from Chicago took more than 50 hours to get to New Orleans. By 1889, the Chicago & New Orleans Limited (later the Panama Limited) was making the trip in 23 hours.

By the 1930s, even the fastest steam trains had come to seem a little stodgy compared to the newest automobiles and airplanes. Trains had excited that first generation of travelers because they were so sleek and fast compared to wagons and horse-drawn alternatives. The more open-eyed rail execs knew that the way to compete with automobiles and planes was to make trains sleek and fast again.

One 1930s version of the Japanese "bullet trains" was the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy's *Zephyr*, which debuted in 1934. The streamlined stainless steel *Zephyr* was a jetliner of a train that moved on diesel and electric power, 33 percent more efficiently than did its steam-powered competitors. The train cut travel times on some routes almost in half, and for a time revived that road's sagging intercity passenger business.

In 1939, the Milwaukee Road's version of the *Zephyr*, the *Hiawatha*, offered the fastest regularly scheduled passenger train in the world; trains reached 100 mph and more along parts of its trips to and from the Twin Cities and Chicago. The Rock Island *Rocket* ran from Chicago to Peoria in only two hours and 45 minutes. Even commuter rail revved up. The interurban line that served Chicago's North Shore in the 1920s ran its famous Electroliner cars on its Skokie Valley run, a bypass that paralleled today's Edens Expressway. The Electroliners zipped along at speeds of up to 70 mph in what was basically a souped-up trolleycar.

General Motors unveiled its prototype Aerotrain in 1955. The train locomotive looked like a Buick and its cars looked like buses. Because it used only 1.3 gallons of fuel per mile at top speed, the Aerotrain seemed to be a great deal for cash-short railroads. It turned out to be less of a bargain for riders; its passenger cars were basically modified GM buses, whose air suspension system could not protect riders from the jostling that results from running at high speed over a freight track.

All of these early high-speed passenger trains had traits in common: new power sources, streamlined bodies and lighter cars. Some, like the Aerotrain, didn't work because they used immature technology, but they were on the right track, as it were, that later led to the European and Japanese supertrains. The promise of others was betrayed by lousy tracks. By the 1960s, the *Rocket*s out of the Quad Cities and Peoria were almost always late because the drivers couldn't safely use all their locomotives' speed — the same problem that Amtrak has today on parts of the St. Louis-Chicago run. The GM train might have worked on a smooth welded track of the sort used today in other countries.

Illinois firms haven't built any high-speed trains lately, but that hasn't stopped Illinoisans from thinking about them. In the 1980s, engineers at the Argonne National Lab outside Chicago sketched the outlines of trains that would use magnets to lift them above the track, allowing them to zoom, frictionless, at speeds of up to 300 miles per hour. Such a magnetic levitation or "mag-lev" train would get from Chicago to St. Louis in one hour. Such wonders don't come cheap, but a few have been built anyway. One mag-lev line in Shanghai using German technology hits speeds of 250 mph. A slow-speed mag-lev train operates in Japan, and others are being considered or have been planned in Britain and Germany.

Yet Illinois, despite its early promise, remains in the Third World when it comes to the newest high-speed train technology. ❑

James Krohe Jr.

signal and crossing systems, including an experimental technology that uses Global Positioning System satellites and computers to prevent collisions.

These are welcome improvements, and long overdue. But they will not carry Illinois passengers quite into the 21st century. Instead of state-of-the-art trains, they will deliver State-of-Illinois trains. What the Illinois Department of Transportation is calling "high speed" rail passenger service between Chicago and St. Louis is really just higher speed service. When upgrades and testing now under way are finished, the St. Louis-to-Dwight leg will be able to run at a peak speed of 110 miles per hour. *The Economist* has noted that, while this may be "enough to wow the mid-west," even the top speed on the fastest part of the line will be as much as 75 mph slower than French or Japanese trains. And, for much of the line, the trains won't even run that fast. North of Dwight, trains will not exceed the present maximum operating speed of 79 mph. As a result, travel time from St. Louis to Chicago will be reduced by a modest 90 minutes, down from five-and-a-half hours. The state transportation department calls shaving 90 minutes off today's travel time "a realistic goal," which in Illinois means, "We can't afford to do better."

Why is Illinois' high-speed rail network running slow even before it is built? For one thing, it can be argued, it is unwise. Building European-style trains in a state that cannot match Europe's population density or land use would be like building skyscrapers in Taylorville. It also can be argued that trains running faster than 110 mph are unneeded. If ridership forecasts are to be believed — and they tend to be as optimistic as Amtrak timetables — even a 90-minute improvement in travel time between St. Louis and Chicago will see the number of riders on St. Louis-Chicago trains increase nearly fivefold. The proof is Amtrak's *Hiawatha*s that run between Chicago and Milwaukee. This service is cost-competitive and time-competitive. The 90-mile trip takes roughly 90 minutes. It is convenient, with the trains going from downtown to downtown with a new stop at Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport. It is pleasant; first-class seating offers a riding experience



The **Hiawatha** *in Chicago, circa 1940.*

more akin to the automobile than to a bus. And it is reliable, with the best on-time performance of any Amtrak route in the nation. No wonder that in May that line's monthly ridership of nearly 44,000 was 18 percent higher than the same month a year before and marked the sixth month in a row the line set a record.

Ask any regular Amtrak rider, and he will tell you that average speeds of even 75 mph will do just fine, thank you — if everything else works. Certainly, Amtrak riders in other states think so. Amtrak's Cascade Corridor trains that link Eugene, Ore., and Vancouver, British Columbia, with stops in Portland, Tacoma and Seattle, last year carried more than 600,000 riders. These are no bullet trains — the allowable top speed is 79 mph — but they do offer everything else the traveler wants. The line features new, made-in-Spain trainsets, spiffed-up stations and reliable on-time performance, the last made possible by a capable and committed freight railroad host. The result is that one in five business travelers between Portland and Seattle use the trains, though there are only three departures per day.

There are good public interest reasons to move Illinoisans to and fro on steel wheels rather than rubber ones. Trains are safer, less polluting and use less energy and land — but such benefits will be a happy side effect of a switch to them, not the reason for it. Convenience and cost are what people look for. Trains are popular in areas of the United States where the car isn't. Amtrak ridership in Illinois has been setting records of late, in no small part because of higher gasoline prices. In fact, demand for trains in Illinois would match that in California, in the crowded I-5 corridor in the Pacific Northwest and in the Northeast Corridor from Boston to the District of Columbia, if our interstates were as congested as theirs, and if our gasoline prices were as high as Europe's. But they are not, and demand does not. Thus the choice to fund incremental improvements to the existing rail system rather than replacement.

When it comes to Amtrak, the nation can't afford not to do better. The jerry-rigged system that was set up in 1971 has not worked for many reasons, including the antiquated rolling stock, the bloated costs and the absurd deal that gave passenger trains a right to be run on track owned by freight lines only by allowing freight to take precedence over riders.

There are plenty of observers who have concluded that if America rides into its future on trains, those trains will not be run by Amtrak. But what ought to replace it?

President George W. Bush's administration has been clear about what it does not want: Amtrak and its national route system. The administration is not clear about what it does want.

At different times, administration spokesmen have said that Amtrak should sell off its assets outside the Northeast and let private firms pick up whatever pieces offer profit potential. This is broadly consistent with the recommendations of the Amtrak reform council, which urged that the Northeast corridor service be split off as a separate company, and a second son-of-Amtrak

Rebuilding passenger rail according to the highway model would require a shift of federal funding away from running a transportation company and toward building a transportation infrastructure.

be set up to run trains elsewhere under more or less present arrangements. The latter entity would be free to achieve such operating economies as outsourcing food and beverage and other services and renegotiating Amtrak's cripplingly expensive union agreements, which it inherited along with equally outdated trains from the freight railroads.

Others in the Bush Administration argue that the nation's long-distance services should be replaced with short-distance services whose operating costs are subsidized by the states, not by the feds. They have offered as a model for their reinvented Amtrak the quasi-socialist, state-owned Alaska Railroad — a system that pays no state or local taxes and has its capital costs covered by federal grants, with underwriting from the cruise ship industry.

People who have thought more deeply see neither a fully privatized rail system nor a fully socialized one, but a complex collection of public-private partnerships of varying kinds, devised to meet the varying transportation needs and resources of different parts of the country. The "private" part of such setups are not likely to be new companies, as dreamed of by the more imaginative free-market critics, but the nation's existing freight railroads. Observers with memories that reach back further than the administration of President Ronald Reagan will recall that Amtrak exists only because private railroads wanted nothing to do with intercity rail. They remain involved only because they were obliged to let Amtrak run its trains on their tracks in most parts of the country, including Illinois.

Such arrangements do not, however, get at what is really amiss about Amtrak. Better rail infrastructure is the key to improving train service. Amtrak's trains are where Illinois' automobiles were before the 1920s push to pave the roads. Under Amtrak, the infrastructure — the track system — is privately owned while the carrier is public. While government is singularly well-suited to provide national transportation infrastructure, it is singularly ill-suited to running a lean and nimble service business.

Among Illinois' engineered transportation systems, highways, of course, are public ways. Private motor vehicles of all types are allowed to use them, subject to modest fees in the form of gas taxes, license fees and so on. Rebuilding passenger rail according to the highway model would require a shift of federal funding away from running a transportation company and toward building a transportation infrastructure. The resulting publicly owned "interstate" of rails would be open to private train operators who bid for the right to serve specific routes in return for a fee.

Under most Amtrak reform scenarios, the role of the states in providing passenger rail will change. They could end up contracting for, if not actually running, trains rather than merely helping to pay for them. They could acquire and manage new rail infrastructure. They could regulate private carriers.

But how to pay for it? Ticket sales will never cover it — they never did, as passenger train service in the old days was always subsidized by the freight revenues of the parent railroads. Setting up a passenger rail trust fund similar to the aviation fund supplied by airline ticket fees or the highway trust fund supplied by federal gasoline taxes sounds good, but such a fund would have to be supplied by a passenger rail industry that does not yet exist.

In 2001, Congress proposed a High Speed Rail Investment Act that called for paying for such work by bonds, to be dispersed according to an 80-20 federal/state formula — the same split, basically, that pays for building interstate highways. Bush's transportation department has said it would back a 50-50 federal fund match for state investments in passenger stations, trains and tracks, but has proposed no new funding source.

Even a comprehensive intrastate passenger service is unaffordable and, except on a few routes, unneeded, considering that rural Illinois has so many more roads and so many fewer people than it once did. As noted, trains are today most fit for trips that are too long to make by car and not long enough to be worth the trouble of taking a plane. In the case of a high-speed train, that means trips of 300 to 500 miles; in the case of less speedy but still zippy trains, 200 to 400 miles. There is plenty of potential for rail links of that distance in a big state such as Illinois. A quality rail link to tie the state's top research university in Urbana and its biggest city would seem a good place to start.

In days past, the private sector chose where to run trains, according to the prospects for profit. In a government-controlled train system, routes would be chosen according to the prospects of — what? Trains are not about economic development, or jobs, or civic pride, although one wouldn't think that to read the debate about Amtrak. The system's 46-state, 22,000-mile route system makes little sense in transportation terms, but is very efficient in political terms, as its tracks cross the districts of half the members of the U.S. House.

In general, new trains should go where the people are, and that means northeastern Illinois. All of the Illinois transportation department's current trains terminate there. Metra, the commuter rail part of metropolitan Chicago's troika of public transit systems, does a fine job, and as it extends its reach ever farther into the exurbs, it functions increasingly as a true intercity system. Metra lines already run to Antioch on the Wisconsin line, to Harvard, with plans to go past that town to Huntley and eventually Belvidere, in the Rockford suburbs. Metra tracks soon will reach beyond Orland Park to Manhattan south of Joliet and past Geneva to Elburn, among other extensions on the drawing boards. This is pretty much how Illinois' first passenger rail system evolved, one segment at a time,



The lobby of Chicago's Union Station, circa 1940.

in response to local needs. A new one is likely to consist of existing commuter lines extending farther into the hinterlands and a few "high-er" speed corridors connecting downstate metropoli.

Building a stable fiscal infrastructure for passenger rail in Illinois will be the real challenge. Federal help for infrastructure investments is likely to be forthcoming, but under almost all of the Amtrak reform scenarios, the states will have to get out and push if they want to see passenger trains running within their borders.

Illinois got aboard that train a long time ago. The 10 regional and transcontinental Amtrak routes that emanate from Chicago are joined by 18 trains serving three in-state corridors that are operated by Amtrak but largely paid for by the state, which also markets the product and contributes to the cost of infrastructure improvements. The state also chips in a modest part of the operating costs for Amtrak's *Hiawathas* between Chicago and Milwaukee, most of which is covered by the state of Wisconsin.

Even this modest level of service, however, has proven hard to pay for. And no wonder; noncommuter rail in all its forms made up 1.1 percent of the transportation department's FY2004 budget. St. Louis-Chicago was expected to be the first semi-high-speed corridor in the United States outside the Northeast to become operational, but progress toward completion has been as halting as a *Texas Eagle* heading toward Chicago, due mainly to money shortages. It was expected to be finished in 2002, which by Amtrak standards isn't late at all.

A dedicated state funding source for rail operations would be useful. California lawmakers in the 1990s engineered a deal by which pro-rail lawmakers swapped votes for a boost in the motor fuel tax in exchange for a cut of the new money. They also proposed a $10 billion high-speed rail bond referendum in 2002 that was scheduled to appear on the referendum ballot in 2004. A public vote is still planned, but it has been postponed until at least 2006, pending an improvement in that state's economy.

The prospects of Illinois voters backing such a commitment seem slim. Illinoisans won't vote to spend a lot more money to improve trains without seeing first-hand the benefits they might provide, and they won't be persuaded of the benefits of good train service until the state spends more money.

Meanwhile, the rider on her way to Chicago, staring out a window at farm fields while she waits for Illinois' trains to start moving again, in every sense, may find her thoughts turning naturally to chickens and eggs. More Illinoisans don't ride trains because they aren't good enough, and the trains aren't good enough because not enough Illinoisans ride them. Maybe, she muses, if stupid state policies helped drive intercity passenger rail out of business in Illinois, intelligent ones can bring it back. ❑

James Krohe Jr., a veteran commentator on Illinois public issues, is writing a guide to the state's history for the Illinois Humanities Council.

All aboard?

The feds are paying to upgrade Illinois' Amtrak stations, but train travelers might be left standing on the platform

by Kurt Erickson

City officials in Normal aim to resurrect their community's downtown. They've paved the way for a new children's museum and begun negotiations on a hotel and conference site for that central Illinois town, which lies in the shadow of Illinois State University. Now they're hoping to make it easier for people to get there. The check from the feds should help.

In August, they received the latest installment in federal money to help build a $36 million Amtrak station. The new facility, to be located in the heart of downtown, would replace a small train station located across the tracks. It also would serve taxis and buses.

This federal help comes as President George W. Bush's administration pushes to eliminate the federal funding that has kept the nation's passenger rail system afloat since 1971. U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta has said the president might veto Amtrak rail subsidies of more than $1.2 billion unless Congress adopts reforms that would address an estimated $29 billion in losses since the trains began rolling more than three decades ago.

Observers say the irony of improving stations when Amtrak may someday stop rolling is a fitting example of the way the United States deals with passenger rail issues. "It doesn't make any sense to do it this way," says Rick Harnish, executive director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition. "It doesn't make any sense the way we do transportation planning overall."

Nationally recognized Amtrak critic Joseph Vranich, himself a former spokesman for the company, doesn't question the need for improving stations. But, he says, local officials might be going overboard. "It looks as if this is pork run rampant. It boggles my mind that the taxpayers' money would be spent on what seems like a Taj Mahal," says Vranich, author of *End of the Line: The Failure of Amtrak Reform and the Future of America's Passenger Trains*, which was published last year.

Like Normal, other Illinois cities are investing resources in new stations. Champaign undertook a similar plan several years ago, which resulted in a $9 million downtown facility. A third of the funding came from the federal government.

Springfield this year received $5 million in planning dollars through the federal transportation bill for a new station project Mayor Tim Davlin says could someday cost $50 million.

In August, Mattoon, a key stop for students heading to and from Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, received $2.5 million from the federal government. That is half the estimated cost of restoring Mattoon's 87-year-old station into one that will serve trains and buses, as well as a museum highlighting the history of Coles County.

"Maybe this is one of those cases of station envy," says Vranich. "You know, I want my station to be bigger than their station. Shame on them. Shame on them all."

Whether or not the building boom is mere civic competition, supporters of the upgrades say the millions spent on new stations show that the Bush Administration is on the wrong track when it comes to targeting Amtrak for elimination.

"The president, I think, is a little out of touch in terms of how important Amtrak is, particularly to communities in areas like downstate Illinois and rural communities where it is the primary way of getting back and forth to some of the major urban centers," U.S. Sen. Barack Obama said during a stop in Springfield this summer to hail passage of the federal transportation bill.

The standoff between Congress and the president over Amtrak has its roots in good, old-fashioned politics that enable congressmen to shower their districts with federal dollars. Cities, happy to tap the federal spigot for downtown improvement projects, have figured out a lucrative loophole in the federal budgeting process.

If the towns only wanted money to rebuild their stations, that cash would likely come out of the Amtrak budget, where it would face tougher scrutiny, given the administration's beliefs about Amtrak. But, by making the stations

Photograph courtesy of the office of U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin



U.S. Sens. Barack Obama and Richard Durbin visited Normal in August to announce that the Senate Appropriations Committee had approved allocating funds for the city's planned $36 million multimodal transportation center.

stopping points for buses and other forms of transportation, towns are able to access dollars through the highway budget.

In Springfield, for example, Mayor Davlin says a new multimodal facility is needed to help with an influx of visitors to the city's new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

"This goes above and beyond Amtrak," Davlin says. "It's the buses, the taxis. In other communities, they've built day care centers so working people can come in and have a handy place to leave their young ones."

As Harnish puts it: "The money for these projects is coming out of a very different pot of cash."

But it's not just federal money that is being spent on Amtrak stations up and down the state's three main rail corridors. Since Bush put a target on Amtrak five years ago, the Illinois Department of Transportation has continued to spend money on station improvements.

In 2004, the state transportation agency spent $222,000 to upgrade message boards at nine stations. In 2002, the state chipped in $50,000 to build a new station in Centralia and $68,000 to help fund a new roof at the Mattoon station. In 2001, the department spent $197,000 in Princeton, $50,000 in Macomb and $14,000 in Mendota for station and platform improvements. And, in fiscal year 2000, the state chipped in $100,000 to rebuild the station at Effingham, $100,000 to reconstruct the platform in Galesburg and $120,000 for platform work in Kankakee.

The state's $1 million outlay for station improvements doesn't count the existing cost of running Amtrak trains through the state. Nor does it account for more than $10 million aimed at bringing high-speed trains to the Chicago-St. Louis corridor and a yearly grant of $12 million in state money that pays for extra trains between Chicago and Springfield.

U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, an Urbana Republican who brought home money for stations in Normal and Mattoon this year, says the station upgrades are a good investment because Congress won't let Amtrak go belly up.

"They are not going to stop running," Johnson declares. "We're going to keep them on the tracks."

Normal Mayor Chris Koos says town officials were initially worried about spending money on the city's new transportation center because of Bush's stance on Amtrak.

"It's something we thought about. But we felt pretty comfortable that we wouldn't be impacted by any of that," Koos says. "Even in a worst case scenario, if Amtrak went away, this corridor would probably privatize because it's a profitable corridor. Even if there was a smaller level of service, I think we'd still be fine."

In Springfield, Mayor Davlin says he sees nothing wrong with the millions of dollars being spent.

"Is Amtrak going to go away forever? I don't think so," says Davlin. "I think rail service is here to stay. Our very own Abraham Lincoln, after all, signed into law the [Pacific] Railroad Act."

Vranich, who was president of the High Speed Rail Association until breaking from Amtrak, says improving stations is not necessarily a bad investment.

"Generally, it's a good idea because Illinois has the routes that offer some potential for the future." Despite his

Architectural rendering courtesy of Hance, Utz & Associates



The Coles County Historical Society is leading fundraising efforts to renovate the depot in Mattoon.

Architectural rendering courtesy of Hance, Utz & Associates



The federal transportation bill included $2.5 million toward the renovation of the Mattoon train depot.

Photograph courtesy of Hance, Utz & Associates



Mattoon's Illinois Central Railroad Depot opened in 1918 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

criticism of Amtrak and the size of subsidies related to it, he says, "I have no problem seeing some tax dollars going into something like Bloomington-Normal, Champaign-Urbana, Quincy, Springfield. These make sense. That's where the market is."

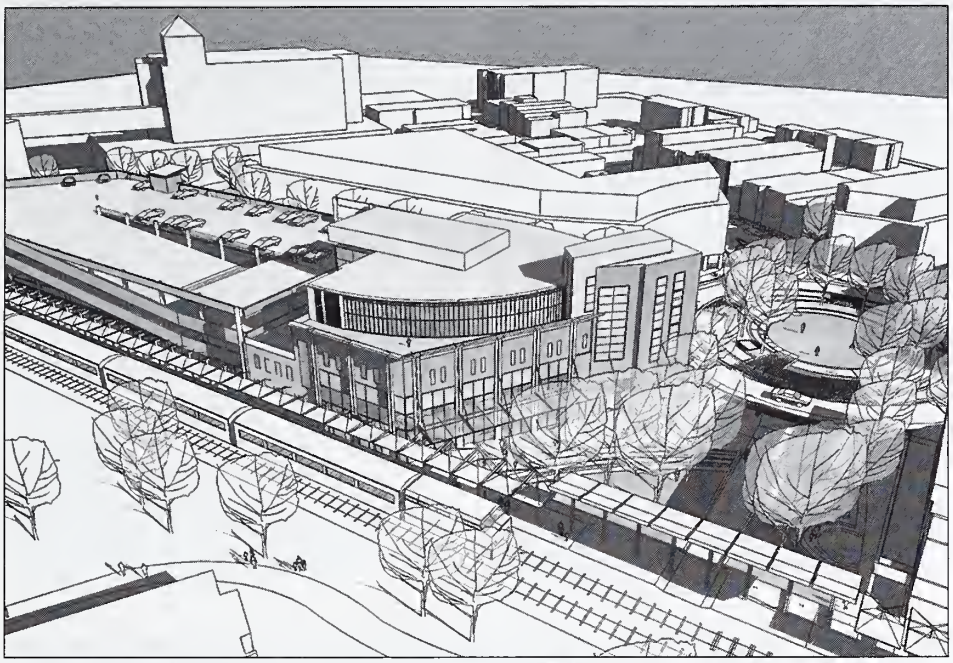
Vranich, who lives in Irvine, Calif., says the future of the nation's passenger rail network lies with shorter routes. The system could be reconfigured to eliminate the long-haul, multistate trains operated by Amtrak that lose money in favor of competitively bid shorter-run trains. "I don't want to get rid of all the trains. I want to get rid of the useless trains."

In late August, the current head of Amtrak made a whistle-stop tour of Illinois in hopes of lobbying the public to get behind Amtrak as it heads into the final stages of the appropriation process in Congress.

With Bush continuing to insist on cutting off funding, David Gunn, Amtrak president and chief executive officer, says he believes Congress will come to the rescue once again.

"The reason why we are going to survive is because of the local communities. It's not because of some policy gurus in Washington. It's going to be because of the people close to the problems. Those people know they want those trains to

Architectural rendering courtesy of the city of Normal



Normal plans to build a transportation center that would be home base for the city bus system, intercity and charter buses, Amtrak, airport shuttles, taxis and park-and-ride facilities.

Photograph courtesy of the city of Normal



Normal wants to replace its Amtrak station with a multimodal center.

"They can be viable, strong things in the community, even if they are not used as a train station," says David Johnson, assistant director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers.

run, and they want more service. It's the grass roots that is going to keep this thing going."

Obama says the tug-of-war between Bush and Congress over funding for passenger rail service isn't very complicated. "I think that the reason you see investment in these things is because representatives and senators are running the show and not the president."

U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin also predicted a victory for Amtrak. "Congress has overcome that [Bush] administration policy in the past, and I think we will again this year."

Even if Bush somehow succeeds in eliminating Amtrak, passenger rail supporters say the stations will be a good investment.

"They can still be community centers. They can be viable, strong things in the community, even if they are not used as a train station," says David Johnson, assistant director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. "The buildings, even if for some reason we'd lose rail service, the buildings would still have a purpose." ❑

Kurt Erickson is the Springfield bureau chief for The Pantagraph *of Bloomington.*

Weighty freight

Chicagoland's supremacy as a shipping hub is endangered by the region's overburdened transport system

by Stephanie Zimmermann

Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress



A night view of a Chicago freight yard

Every time a Chicagoan points and clicks on an Internet purchase to be shipped by United Parcel Service, another bit of weight is added to the region's overstrained freight system.

That's because, with the explosion in Asian-made consumer goods, there's a good chance the item has come through a West Coast port. From there, it's packed in a shipping container that's placed on a train, and, in the case of UPS, it eventually rides the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway right into west suburban Willow Springs. It rolls down the rails near the Tri-State Tollway and 75th Street, where Willow Springs becomes Hodgkins. Dozens more of the huge shipping containers chug into the UPS facility on rails, are unloaded for sorting, then re-packed according to destination and placed onto truck beds.

This rail-to-truck (and sometimes back to rail again) shipping, called intermodal freight, is one reason UPS' Hodgkins facility is the largest package sorting center in the world.

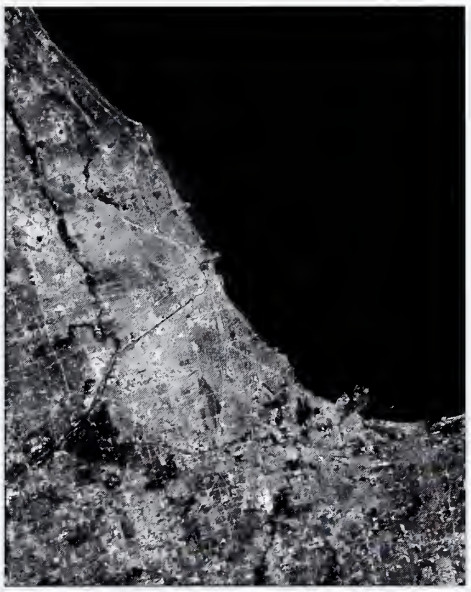
Multiplying that fictional consumer's package by 1.5 million gives a sense of what the facility handles in a single day. The 1.5-million-square-foot center on

Chicagoland's congested highways

Average motorist's annual delay

YEAR	HOURS
1982	16
1993	42
2002	56
2003	58

SOURCE: *Texas Transportation Institute Urban Mobility Report 2005*



The Chicagoland region is crisscrossed by a complex grid of roads and railway lines, an aerial view shows.

Expanding highways

The planning group Metropolis 2020 estimates that spending $3 billion over 25 years to build 1,585 miles of lanes would:

Cut truck travel time by **6 percent**

Get annual savings of **$3.9 billion**

Increase sales by **$8.5 billion**

Produce **17,314 new jobs**

SOURCE: *Metropolis 2020*

240 acres employs 7,500 people, all of them getting UPS freight on its way. Fourteen trains and numerous trucks go in and out of the facility each day.

And the intermodal freight center used by UPS is just one of many. Food, clothing, televisions, computers, machine parts, appliances and much more are moving through the Chicago area at any given moment. All told, the region moves more than $920 billion worth of goods in a year, accounting for some 87,000 jobs worth $3.5 billion in compensation. The only place in America where six of the largest rail lines intersect, a place with 24,000 miles of roads and more than 2,800 miles of railroad tracks, the Chicago region is the undisputed king of U.S. freight, joining Hong Kong and Singapore as world leaders in the movement of goods.

But the region's supremacy is under attack. A legacy of uncoordinated planning, a slow, antiquated rail system and heavily clogged roads bursting with trucks all threaten the health and future of Chicago's freight system.

"Average people recognize the nuisance issues," says Jim LaBelle, deputy director of Chicago Metropolis 2020, a nonprofit organization concerned with the region's economic future. He points to such places as south suburban Blue Island, where freight trains clog the community on a daily basis. "Those folks recognize the nuisance of having the trains in the way. Motorists are aware of the increasing number of trucks on our roads."

But beyond recognizing the inconvenience, the depth of Chicago's freight system problems hasn't aroused the public's passion.

"It's not as sexy as a highway or other project," admits Paul Nowicki, assistant vice president government and public policy for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway. "Freight and goods movement and supply chains are behind the scenes."

The civic-minded Chicago Metropolis 2020, founded in 1999 by The Commercial Club of Chicago, is sounding the alarm. In its report issued last year, *The Metropolis Freight Plan: Delivering the Goods*, the organization urged government and industry leaders to correct problems in the system before it devolves into freight gridlock and endless commuter traffic jams.

"We want to be able to drive, right?" asks LaBelle. "If we don't plan for this, our road system is going to be overrun by trucks, and we're not going to be able to handle it."

Historically, railways didn't want a lot of government help. Funded almost entirely with private money, freight railways have zealously guarded their right to control their own futures. Meanwhile, the federal government actively backed freight shipping on trucks by building the interstate highway system. At the same time, local governments didn't do much to make sure trucks had a connected system of approved local truck routes — much less worry about whether truck routes were located near railroads.

The advent of "just-in-time delivery," as opposed to warehousing large inventories of goods, along with the explosion of imports from China and elsewhere, has given the U.S. shipping industry a huge increase in business. The amount of freight brought through the Chicago region on railroads is expected to increase by at least 70 percent by 2030. Meanwhile, the number of trucks rumbling across Chicago-area roads is poised to increase by at least 80 percent during the same period, the report warns. Because trucks are larger than cars, they account for two-thirds of the projected increase in traffic on area roads.

"We're not prepared to handle that kind of volume," LaBelle says.

The breakneck speed of growth is making the old ways of doing things unworkable.

"Obviously, not only do we have severe congestion today in both our highways and our freight rail traffic, but if we don't prepare for growth in the future, it's going to severely choke our economy," says Joseph Szabo, state legislative director for the United Transportation Union, which represents about 125,000 active and retired

Photograph courtesy of United Parcel Service



Packages are brought by rail to be sorted and loaded onto waiting trucks at the United Parcel Service's intermodal freight center in Hodgkins.

railroad, bus and mass transit workers in the United States and Canada. "Every time I'm stuck in traffic on the interstate, I curse our transportation planners."

So what can be done?

The Metropolis 2020 plan contains several recommendations, including one that's already been acted upon. This summer, Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed legislation merging the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission and the Chicago Area Transportation Study into one organization called the Regional Planning Board. The merger will put planning for land use, roads, public transportation and freight movement into one organization governed by 15 members drawn from Chicago, suburban Cook County and the collar counties.

The plan also recommends increased use of intermodal truck-and-train centers, like the one used by UPS in Hodgkins. Other examples of healthy intermodal centers include the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Logistics Park at the old Joliet Arsenal and the Union Pacific Global III intermodal site in Rochelle, where trains bringing goods to the 1,200-acre facility in Ogle County can switch containers to trucks bound for Interstate 88 or Interstate 39 or another train.

But as Mike Payette, assistant vice president for governmental affairs for Union Pacific can attest, finding large enough parcels of land near an interstate highway and railways, where residents won't complain of noise and traffic, can be a tall order. Union Pacific was hit with resident opposition near the DuPage Airport and in Maple Park in western Kane County before finally being welcomed by Rochelle, which was looking to attract more industry. The Metropolis 2020 report identifies five large sites around the Chicago region that it says should be preserved for future intermodal freight centers, including land near Peotone where backers want a new airport.

Any comprehensive freight strategy also must include rail infrastructure improvements, LaBelle and Nowicki say. The state's Chicago Regional Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) rail infrastructure improvement plan, a $1.5 billion program intended to span 10 years, includes plans for railroad "flyovers" — bridges where one set of tracks crosses another — plus signal modernization and other improvements.

The recent federal transportation bill includes $100 million toward CREATE's projects over four years, something advocates call an OK beginning but far short of the total amount they say is needed. (CREATE's backers had hoped for $900 million in federal money over a decade.) Also, the cash-strapped state government will have to contribute $25 million to get the federal money, and it has proposed, but not committed, $300 million over the life of the program. The freight railroads have pledged to kick in $212 million of their own money over 10 years.

As for the trucks, the Metropolis 2020 report has several ideas to smooth out their use of the roads. For one, the creation of county planning organizations would be a first step in ironing out problems with unconnected local truck routes. The way things stand now, the state, counties and

Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress



This image of trucks unloading at the Illinois Central Railroad freight house at the South Water Street terminal in Chicago was taken in 1943.

272 municipalities have their own say in designating or banning the use of roads for truck routes for 80,000-pound semi-trailers. No one is required to coordinate those routes.

"Local officials say, 'We don't want these trucks on our roads,'" says Don Schaefer, vice president of the Mid-West Truckers Association. "The problem is, we've got so many jurisdictions that have their hands involved."

Another recommendation to ease truck traffic congestion is using barrier-free tollway technology to institute variable toll pricing, which could be used to get trucks off the roads during peak traffic times. If truckers could pay less by traveling in the evening, for instance, it could dramatically cut commuters' travel times on area roads.

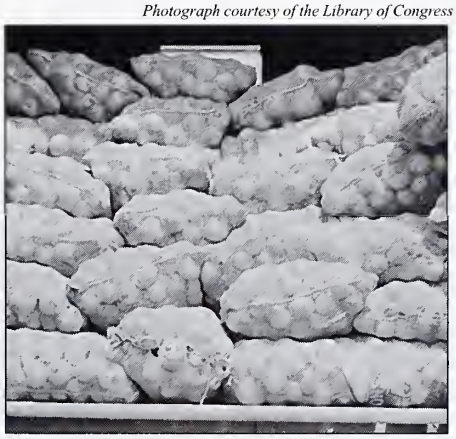
The recommendations are many and the work is daunting. But freight industry officials say something must be done. "I think it's a slow process of education, and it's our job to educate policymakers," Payette says. "I think a good start has been made."

If the area does nothing, Chicago's freight business may be shipped somewhere else — somewhere with fewer bottlenecks and less political baggage.

"The leader of a major railroad told me the only reason why Chicago won't continue to be the leader is if we fail to invest in our transportation infrastructure," LaBelle says. "It's really a national challenge for us to make sure this hub functions well." ❑

Stephanie Zimmermann is a reporter for the Chicago Sun-Times.

Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress



Chicago grew as a major freight portal by linking produce from the nation's heart to the East Coast.

CREATE

Regional rail plan ideas

- Replace grade-level crossings with overpasses or underpasses
- Create six rail-to-rail "flyover" bridges to separate passenger and freight trains
- Improve deteriorated railroad viaducts
- Modernize track and signal equipment

SOURCE: *Chicago Department of Transportation*



Photograph courtesy of the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

Ethanol harvest

Why did political support for the corn-based fuel additive grow this year? Conditions were just right

by Dori Meinert

More than a decade ago, Leon Corzine, a fifth-generation farmer from the small central Illinois town of Assumption, made his first trip to Washington, D.C., to lobby for ethanol research funds. In August, he headed west to New Mexico to watch as President George W. Bush signed comprehensive energy legislation that will increase ethanol use and could ensure a stronger market for Illinois corn farmers and ethanol producers.

"I see the energy bill as being historic," says Corzine, who is now president of the National Corn Growers Association. "We see it as a first step, a very big step, but a step in the recognition that agriculture has a lot of answers for the things that are challenging to the U.S. economy and U.S. society, maybe society worldwide."

The new law marks the first time the federal government has made a commitment to renewable fuels, says Monte Shaw, a spokesman for the Renewable Fuels Association, which represents ethanol producers.

It also is evidence of the growing political clout of ethanol producers and the farmers who depend on them.

The industry is expected to produce 4 billion gallons of ethanol by the end of this year. But under the new law, refiners are required to nearly double use of the corn-based fuel additive and other renewable fuels to 7.5 billion gallons a year by 2012.

Illinois grows the corn used to make nearly a quarter of the ethanol consumed in the United States. And this state, second only to Iowa in ethanol production, has six ethanol plants up and running. The Illinois Corn Growers Association estimates another six to eight will be built over the next decade as a result of the energy legislation.

Illustrating ethanol's importance to Illinois, the states' two Democratic U.S. senators, Richard Durbin and Barack Obama, drive around in flexible-fuel vehicles that run on E85 fuel, which is 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline. And both supported the energy bill, as did 14 of the state's 19 U.S. House members.

Several factors this year had to converge to garner support for the energy bill, containing the ethanol provision.

Economics, for one. Long before Hurricane Katrina, lawmakers were getting an earful back home about prices at the pump. Meanwhile, the war in Iraq was drawing attention to the United States' heavy dependence on foreign oil. And President Bush was mentioning alternative fuels. Through speeches around the country, he pressured Congress to enact an energy bill. In some, he highlighted ethanol.

Ethanol promoters had other arguments up their sleeves, as well. They argued it would help the environment by reducing certain polluting emissions, and boost the economy by creating U.S. jobs when so many other industries have been shifting jobs overseas.

"We had a lot broader base

Photograph courtesy of the office of U.S. Rep. J. Dennis Hastert



House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, a Plano Republican, dedicates the National Corn-to-Ethanol Research Center at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. To the right is U.S. Rep. John Shimkus, a Republican from Collinsville, who also supports ethanol.

going into this year's energy discussions," Corzine says.

In fact, those discussions have been under way for some years. Previously, the Senate rejected efforts to eliminate an ethanol requirement or a renewable fuels standard, only to see energy legislation die for lack of final action. So it was no surprise this year when the Senate voted down a similar anti-ethanol effort, 69 to 28. A truer test of ethanol's power this year, though, was the Senate vote, 70 to 26, to raise the minimum ethanol usage to 8 billion gallons by 2012, more than the 5 billion minimum set by the House. Ethanol supporters were ecstatic when House-Senate conferees set the ethanol requirement at 7.5 billion gallons.

Ultimately, passage of the energy bill was smoothed when House negotiators agreed to drop their efforts to provide liability protection to the manufacturers of MTBE, or methyl tertiary-butyl ether, a competing fuel additive that 36 states, including Illinois, find contaminates groundwater. The controversial provision was cited by MTBE opponents, including Durbin, as a major reason for blocking a House-Senate conference agreement on the energy bill two years ago.

This year, negotiators also sidestepped a second controversial issue: whether to allow oil drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

A third point of contention was overcome last year when Congress eased tensions between ethanol supporters and highway advocates by ensuring that ethanol tax incentives would be deducted from the U.S. Treasury rather than the federal highway trust fund.

This year's energy bill went further. In an effort to boost the energy market, it includes a tax credit to encourage gas stations to provide motorists with E85 fuel. The credit will cover 30 percent of retailers' equipment costs, up to $30,000. Obama authored the measure, and House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, a Plano Republican, ensured it remained in the House-Senate conference agreement.

Passage of the energy bill was the culmination of a series of recent political victories for the ethanol industry, which has struggled for decades. It had fought off assaults from prominent critics such as U.S. Sen. John McCain, an Arizona Republican. And it drew supporters. Beyond Hastert, it also has had the backing of such political powerhouses as Sen. Charles Grassley, the Iowa Republican who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, and former Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, a South Dakota Democrat.

In addition, Decatur-based Archer Daniels Midland Co., the nation's largest producer of fuel ethanol, has helped the ethanol industry over the years through generous campaign contributions to both political parties. ADM has given $7.7 million in campaign cash since 1990, according to the Center for Responsive Politics database.

Furthermore, ethanol benefits from a presidential election process that begins every four years in corn-producing Iowa.

"The politics of ethanol, especially in the Senate, is a good play. It's the reason why every presidential candidate runs to Iowa and says he loves ethanol," says Frank Maisano, a lobbyist who represents refiners.

This year, Sen. George Allen, a Virginia Republican and possible presidential candidate in 2008, voted for the first time in favor of ethanol. And Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, who was the Democratic candidate last year, was one of the few senators from the Northeast to support ethanol.

It's been a long road to this year's victory. Congress approved the first tax breaks for corn-based fuel during the energy crisis in 1978. In 1990, Congress amended the Clean Air Act to create a program requiring the use of gas additives such as ethanol and MTBE in the nation's most polluted areas. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich stepped in to preserve and extend ethanol's tax breaks at key junctures in the late 1990s. Then, in 2002, oil producers agreed to join agriculture to support a 5-billion-gallon renewable fuels standard in exchange for eliminating a more restrictive fuel additive requirement. But the ethanol industry grew faster than expected as more states turned to it as an alternative to MTBE, and ethanol supporters pushed lawmakers to raise the minimum.

Still, ethanol continues to have its critics. They question the cost, while others contend environmental and health benefits are overstated.

"I don't have any doubts that ethanol works. I also don't have any doubts that it is a piece of our energy future. But what it is not is some kind of silver bullet that means we don't have to do anything else," says David Sykuta, executive director of the Illinois Petroleum Council.

Photograph courtesy of the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture



Sykuta and others argue that ethanol makes a minor contribution to the nation's energy demands. Even at 7.5 billion gallons in 2012, ethanol will make up just 5 percent of the gasoline used in the country, acknowledges Shaw of the Renewable Fuels Association.

"Does that solve the problem? No. But it's a very easy first step," Shaw says.

Coastal state senators, including Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat, complained that the 7.5 billion gallon ethanol mandate would cost the federal government $2 billion because of the 51-cents-per-gallon tax credit ethanol receives.

But Corzine says the renewable fuel standard will help farmers become more independent of government help. And he predicts that the new ethanol requirement will give more stability to the next generation of farmers, including his son.

"We put our heart and soul into this," he says, praising the grass-roots efforts of the state corn grower organizations. "We want to get our income from the marketplace." ❑

Dori Meinert covers Congress for the Copley News Service.

Crumbling commitments

The state promised millions for school construction projects. But the money hasn't gone out. Now local taxpayers are stuck with the bills

by Pat Guinane

Rochester needs a new junior high. State officials won't argue with that. They even agreed to pick up more than half the tab. Still, they never said anything about putting the project on layaway.

Three years after putting up $8.3 million in local money, voters in this central Illinois town had to step up again, this time to shoulder what has been an empty promise from the state.

"The taxpayers did what they were asked to do, which was, show us your local support and the state will grant us an entitlement," says Rochester Superintendent Thomas Bertrand. "Well, they gave us an entitlement and they haven't funded it. So then we had to go back to the voters again."

Rochester isn't alone. From Chicago to the suburbs and on to the far corners of downstate Illinois, two dozen school districts are stuck with crumbling commitments from the state. Millions in construction dollars were promised in 2003. But no money went out.

The state school construction account ran dry after Gov. Rod Blagojevich's first fiscal year, leaving empty-handed school officials to observe two years of bipartisan bickering. The governor and legislative leaders can't agree on a way for the cash-strapped state to fund new school construction, though talks were expected to resume this month.

In the meantime, a growing number of school districts must put up with antiquated infrastructure or find a way to finance construction costs themselves.

In April, Rochester voters agreed to take on another $11.2 million in debt. That, coupled with the $8 million they approved in 2002, would cover additions to the elementary and high schools and a replacement for the junior high, a building where one wing dates to 1921.

"It's your classic old school building where the guts are worn out," Bertrand says. "The electrical, the boiler, the plumbing — the whole infrastructure was completely worn out."

The conditions were poor enough to land Rochester the top spot on the state's school construction priority list. If there's ever any money, Rochester is first in line. But thousands of Illinois schools need electrical and plumbing upgrades, or structural work, or new doors and fire alarms or roofing work, according to a state survey released earlier this year. Eliminating these safety hazards alone would cost an estimated $2.2 billion. The need for new schools and building additions takes the overall price tag to $6.7 billion.

Of course, even if it weren't dealing with its own deficit, the state would not shoulder the entire burden. State construction grants are called entitlements, though districts must prove a physical and a financial need for the state dollars. Rochester, for instance, is scheduled to pay for about 45 percent of its project. If the state doesn't come through soon, Bertrand says, the district will be forced to issue 20-year bonds for the $11 million in debt voters OK'd last spring. That would max out the district's credit and, Bertrand says, make it impossible to address future building needs for at least five years.

Difficult as it would be, Rochester at least could afford to complete its construction efforts. Until the state steps up, the Stewardson-Strasburg school district can't even begin long-needed renovations.

"My district didn't sell the bonds," says Superintendent Ruth Schneider. "We wanted to wait. I guess, 'show me the money' — that kind of thing. We wanted to make sure [the state] was going to come through. That was three years ago. So we're still waiting."

Located about 15 miles north of Effingham in east central Illinois, that district consists of one K-12 building set in the middle of a cornfield. A section of the building is as old as the district itself, which formed when the tiny towns of Stewardson and Strasburg combined schools five decades ago.

"If we don't get some money for

construction, I don't know how we maintain this facility for the 21st century," Schneider says. "We've actually had to cancel school in the past because of sewer back-ups. We're kind of in a low area and when it rains real hard we get sewer back-ups — sometimes even when it doesn't rain. The lines are just old and crumbling and need to be replaced."

Beyond those upgrades, the district — ranked third on the school construction list — wants to add 15 classrooms, two computer labs, a media center and a new gymnasium. The state agreed to pay for nearly two-thirds of the $3.2 million project. But Schneider fears the waiting game will cost her district dearly.

"Construction costs have risen dramatically," she says. "So even though my legislators keep saying to me, 'You're going to get the money. You're going to get the money,' my response has been, 'By the time you get it to us, it's going to be too late.'"

Staff at the State Board of Education and the Capitol Development Board, which jointly administer the school construction program, say they've yet to consider possible inflation adjustments for the projects approved in 2003. That list promised $148.6 million to two dozen school districts, including $29.8 million for Chicago and $29 million for East St. Louis. And while those schools have languished on the waiting list, some 250 more applications are stacking up at the State Board of Education. Those requests won't be approved or denied until new state revenues arrive, although more than three dozen districts already have secured their local shares.

The school construction picture is so bleak that one official says it didn't even merit a mention at a recent conference of school superintendents.

"The reason is that we've given up on it," says Diane Cody, superintendent of Winfield School District 34, which enrolls about 390 elementary students in DuPage County. Winfield is fifth on the state construction list, but its tax base is strong enough that the district was counting on the state for $2.3 million of of the $9 million needed to renovate its buildings and put an addition on the middle school.

Winfield finished the projects last year by taking on additional debt. But, Cody says, parents still want to know when the state is going to live up to its commitment.

"I wrote letters to every single representative and senator in the Illinois legislature explaining our situation," she says. "Everybody was sympathetic, but everybody would say, 'Yes, but we have no revenue source.' And I understand that concept, but then maybe we should cut something else.

"I don't know how a state body can entitle you to this money, and you assume it's coming and it doesn't ever come."

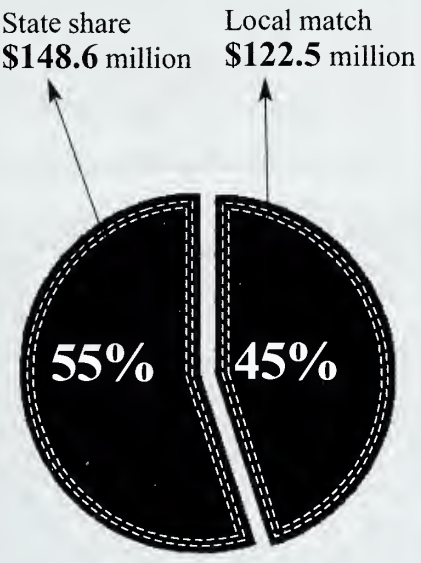
For Cody, the side deals that surrounded spring budget negotiations only stoked her frustration.

"There was money going to all kinds of places in the city of Chicago," she says. "It was the pork money, or whatever they call it. It was very disheartening."

Despite the Democrats' late-session wrangling, the governor remained true to his core principles, counters Becky Carroll, spokeswoman for Blagojevich's budget office.

Waiting for the state

Planned school construction projects



Three years ago, the state approved $271 million in school construction projects for two dozen districts. It still hasn't come through with its $148.6 million share of the cost.

"The legislative process is one of negotiation and compromise," she says. The budget did put another $325 million into education, though it provides no school construction funds. Those dollars will come, Carroll says, when Republicans work constructively to help devise a revenue stream.

"For three years in a row, Republicans have failed to come forward with their own proposals to fund a school construction program and then when it doesn't get done, they like to point a finger at everyone but themselves," she says. "It's rather disingenuous."

Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson, a Greenville Republican, helped sponsor the original school construction program in 1997.

"It's been a huge success," he says. "A lot of schools have benefited. Taxpayers have benefited locally. And we've done a great job of enhancing the infrastructure of schools throughout Illinois as a result of the program."

Still, he's not willing to hand Gov. Blagojevich a blank check.

"I just have some concerns about the administration and how everything is politicized," Watson says. "We can pass the bonds. We can authorize the spending. We can actually appropriate it. But the governor has to release it and there's a real lack of trust in this administration."

Democrats have had their own misgivings.

Last year, Blagojevich wanted to finance $550 million in school construction with a 75-cent increase in the state's per-pack tax on cigarettes. The proposal was soundly opposed by Senate President Emil Jones, who, like Blagojevich, is a Chicago Democrat. The previous year, House Speaker Michael Madigan, also a Chicago Democrat, complained that Blagojevich had offered no method to finance a construction budget that included $550 million for schools. Even if all the Democrats agree on a construction plan and a way to finance it, they still need a handful of Republican votes to achieve the three-fifths vote required for incurring state debt. Blagojevich hasn't orchestrated that sort of bipartisan effort since 2003, roughly the same time the state made its last school construction commitments. ❑

State worker saves abandoned pets

Alissa Camp was going to just load up her pickup truck with food, water and other supplies and head south to try to help care for some of the animals left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

But this state worker, director of unclaimed property for state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka, found herself leading a mission to take supplies to the Gulf Coast and bring abandoned animals back to Illinois. As many as 40 dogs and cats have new homes waiting for them.

"The outpouring of contributions from people wanting to help is enormous, overwhelming," said Camp in mid-September while en route with seven co-workers in a caravan of two U-Hauls and two trucks with supplies collected in Springfield and Chicago. "We have enough to fill two more U-Hauls, so we'll make another trip as soon as we get back." Camp and others used vacation time for the journey.

Treasurer Topinka, who has a page on her Web site (*www.state.il.us/treas*) that helps find homes for animals in state shelters, got behind the New Orleans rescue effort, helping to collect food, toys, leashes and other pet supplies in Chicago. "Pets are lifelong companions that give us a lot of comfort, and they are dependent on our protection," says Topinka, who has two dogs rescued from Illinois pounds. The system that prevented people in New Orleans from taking their pets with them when evacuated to shelters needs to be changed, she says.

Camp and more than two dozen of her fellow state workers also collected supplies for the American Red Cross.

RTA names new chief

Stephen Schlickman, a transit issue consultant and former RTA lobbyist, is the new executive director of the Regional Transportation Authority. He replaces **Paula Thibeault**, whose resignation takes effect October 6. Schlickman is an adjunct lecturer at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Urban Transportation Center.

Director reaches out to fellow musicians



Edward Benyas

Edward Benyas, music director of the Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra and professor of oboe and conducting at Southern Illinois University School of Music, spearheaded an effort to offer jobs and housing to a dozen of the more than 70 displaced members of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. Consequently, of the many voids created by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, one small one is being filled by the Illinois music community.

"These musicians need housing and food, but mainly gainful work," Benyas said in a printed statement.

Two violinists, **Razvan Constantin** and **Zorica Dimova**, husband and wife, joined the Southern Illinois Symphony, playing their first concert on September 27. The Louisiana musicians also will perform with the Illinois Symphony Orchestra in Springfield.

Benyas says he hopes other displaced musicians will take the Illinois symphony community up on its offer to provide them with jobs and housing for their families. He says scores of similar offers have been made by other symphony organizations around the country.

With the city of New Orleans expected to be in a recovery and rebuilding phase for years, Benyas says he expects the Louisiana musicians "to stay with us for several months."

Two GOP senators say they won't run again



Sen. Rick Winkel



Sen. Ed Petka

Republican state Sens. **Ed Petka** of Plainfield and **Rick Winkel** of Champaign have both announced that they will not seek re-election next year.

Petka, who was first elected to the legislature in 1986 as a House member, plans to run for judge in Will County in 2006 rather than re-election to the Senate seat he has held since 1993.

Meanwhile, Winkel, a senator since 2003 who was first elected to the legislature as a House member in 1994, is expected to return to a Champaign law practice.

Appointments

Chicagoan **John Minogue**, the former president of DePaul University, is Gov. Rod Blagojevich's latest appointment to to the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

An adjunct professor in Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, Minogue succeeds **Samuel Gove**. His appointment to a six-year term requires Senate confirmation.

From 1993 to 2004, Minogue was president of DePaul, where he also was a professor of religious studies.

Gove is director emeritus of the Institute for Government and Public Affairs and a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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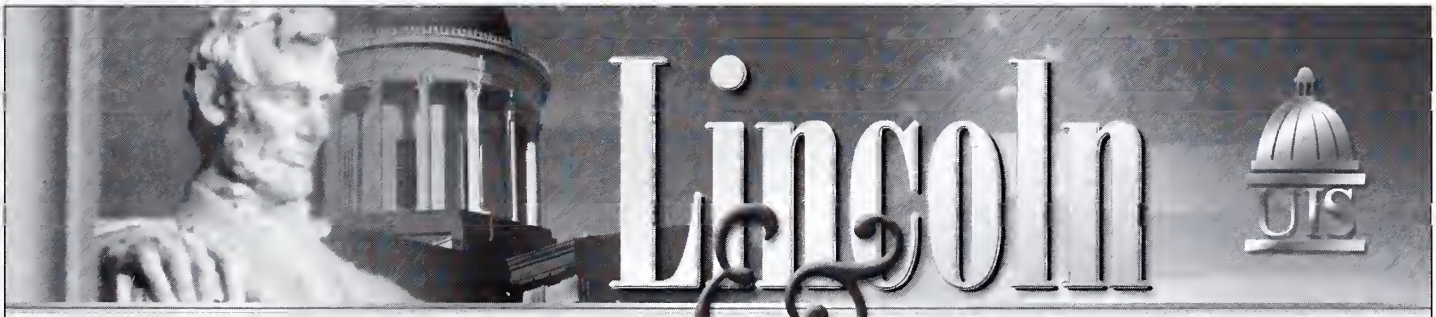


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Charles N. Wheeler III



Illinois faces added expenses with new federal transportation dollars

by Charles N. Wheeler III

"Never look a gift horse in the mouth," cautioned the Roman theologian St. Jerome in a 5th century biblical commentary. Despite such sound advice, Illinois policymakers could hardly be blamed if they were to feel a tad concerned about the massive windfall of federal dollars — an estimated $9.4 billion over five years — the state could receive under the new transportation bill President George W. Bush signed in August.

While state leaders welcomed the federal bonanza for roads, bridges, mass transit and other transportation needs, they're in a position akin to the guy who wins a new car in the church raffle and has to figure out how to come up with the taxes, fees and other expenses that accompany his good fortune.

With the new transportation bill, the "additional expenses" the state faces are the matching amounts required to garner all the available federal dollars.

Transportation officials say they're confident they can find the roughly $1.7 billion needed to match the federal highway funds available over the lifetime of the federal law.

But in addition to a pot of money distributed through federal formulas — which the state generally can use for projects of its choosing — the new law earmarks dollars for a host of specific projects. In some cases, though, the federal money plus the state matching funds may not be enough to cover the full cost of a particular project.

Part of the difficulty is the result of unprecedented use of highway funds for general government spending.

For example, the proposed Prairie Parkway — dear to the heart of U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a Plano Republican — is down for $207 million. Add in the required state match of $52 million, and the total is only about a quarter of the estimated $1 billion price tag to build the new road between Interstates 80 and 88 in Hastert's district. State transportation officials haven't figured out yet where the additional dollars might be found.

Part of the difficulty is the result of unprecedented use of highway funds for general government spending. Gov. Rod Blagojevich's first two budgets siphoned off roughly $1.5 billion in gasoline taxes and license fees to help prop up general state spending, and an estimated $650 million more will be diverted this fiscal year. While highway user fees always have helped pay for such road-related activities as the state police and the secretary of state's licensing operation, the current administration's three-year average for such diversions is roughly double the amount funneled off in prior years.

Nor do record gasoline prices help the beleaguered road fund. The state's motor fuel tax — the single largest state source of highway and bridge money — is a uniform 19 cents a gallon, regardless of how high the pump price goes. So motorists today are paying the same amount per gallon as they did back in the good old days of 99-cent-a-gallon gas. True, drivers also pay a 5 percent state sales tax on gasoline, which does bring in more revenue as pump prices increase. But those receipts go into a different pot and aren't used for road construction or maintenance.

The challenge is even more daunting to find the roughly $650 million needed to match some $2.6 billion in mass transit funding, including federal dollars allocated by formula and money designated for specific projects. Moreover, the federal law authorizes 17 other new transit projects without setting aside any money to cover their estimated $7 billion cost. Instead, the 17 will have to compete with similar ones from across the nation for roughly $8 billion in discretionary transit money, with their chances of success depending in part on how much matching money the state puts up.

Of course, transit officials also are scrambling to cover operating costs. The CTA has warned that its 2006 budget

could be more than $100 million in the red, again threatening fare increases, service cuts and layoffs. The latest projection comes on the heels of the legislature's spring decision to provide $54 million to keep service going this year.

In the past, the state sold bonds to get the money needed to match federal grants for mass transit, helping the Regional Transportation Authority, for instance, to expand its commuter rail services and to replace aging equipment. But the state has exhausted its borrowing authority, and, for the past two years, the legislature has refused to approve additional bond sales, which require three-fifths majorities in both chambers.

In May, legislation to borrow another $2.1 billion for highways and bridges fell four votes short in the Senate on a 32-25 roll call, as no Republican voted for the bill. In debate, GOP senators argued that Blagojevich and the Democratic majority failed to provide any new revenue source to retire the debt. Instead, the bonds would have been repaid from existing gasoline taxes and license fees, which Republicans said could drain away funds needed for future projects.

The state has exhausted its borrowing authority, and, for the past two years, the legislature has refused to approve additional bond sales, which require three-fifths majorities in both chambers.

In fact, the governor initially proposed a 75-cent-a-pack increase in the state cigarette tax to pay off borrowing costs for his proposed capital budget, but the idea was quickly snuffed out by Chicago Democratic Senate President Emil Jones, and no alternative surfaced.

In prior years, transportation bond authorizations have been accompanied by new revenue sources; most recently, for example, license plate fees and alcohol taxes were raised in 1999 to underwrite the highway and mass transit projects contained in Illinois FIRST, former Gov. George Ryan's $12 billion public works program.

Besides fretting about the fiscal prudence of the governor's plan, Republicans complained that Blagojevich wouldn't say which road and bridge projects would be funded, raising concerns the new dollars would bankroll election-year spending in Democratic districts.

The Republicans' points are well taken, and their refusal to support new bonding authority mirrors the stance Democrats took a decade ago when they were in the legislative minority. Still, the clear need for better roads, bridges and transit services should be reason enough for the governor and legislative leaders to make sure that no federal transportation dollars slip away for lack of a match. ❑

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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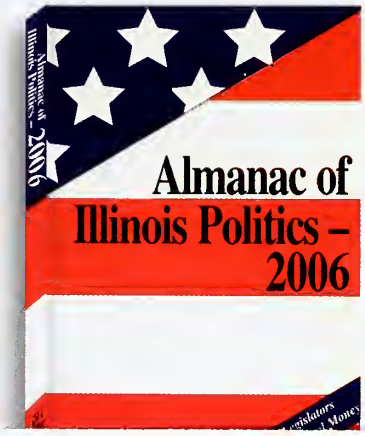
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Minority Leader, Illinois Senate

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could be more than $100 million in the red, again threatening fare increases, service cuts and layoffs. The latest projection comes on the heels of the legislature's spring decision to provide $54 million to keep service going this year.

In the past, the state sold bonds to get the money needed to match federal grants for mass transit, helping the Regional Transportation Authority, for instance, to expand its commuter rail services and to replace aging equipment. But the state has exhausted its borrowing authority, and, for the past two years, the legislature has refused to approve additional bond sales, which require three-fifths majorities in both chambers.

In May, legislation to borrow another $2.1 billion for highways and bridges fell four votes short in the Senate on a 32-25 roll call, as no Republican voted for the

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Republicans said could drain away funds needed for future projects.

In fact, the governor initially proposed a 75-cent-a-pack increase in the state cigarette tax to pay off borrowing costs

by new revenue sources; most recently, for example, license plate fees and alcohol taxes were raised in 1999 to underwrite the highway and mass transit projects contained in Illinois FIRST, former Gov. George Ryan's $12 billion public works program.

Besides fretting about the fiscal prudence of the governor's plan, Republicans complained that Blagojevich wouldn't say which road and bridge projects would be funded, raising concerns the new dollars would bankroll election-year spending in Democratic districts.

The Republicans' points are well taken, and their refusal to support new bonding authority mirrors the stance Democrats took a decade ago when they were in the legislative minority. Still, the clear need for better roads, bridges and transit services should be reason enough for the governor and legislative leaders to make

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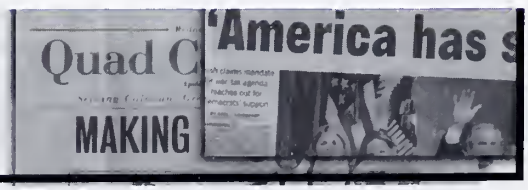
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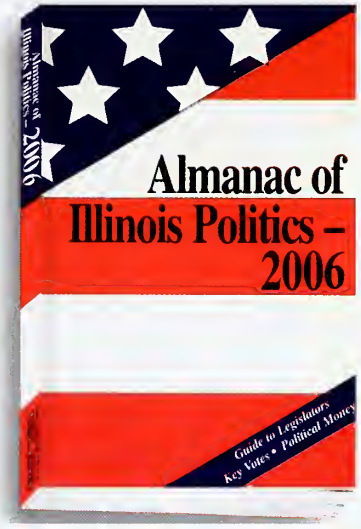
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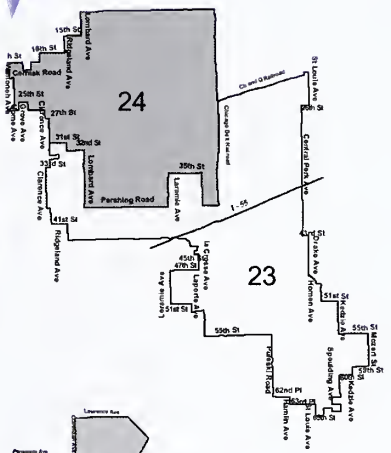
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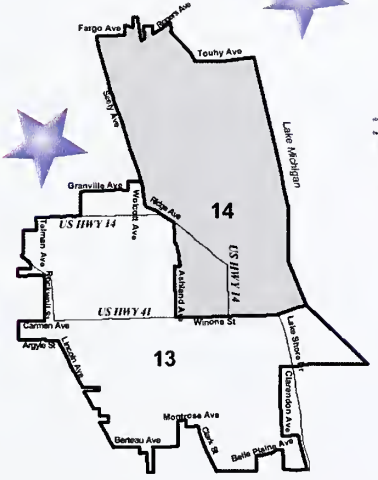
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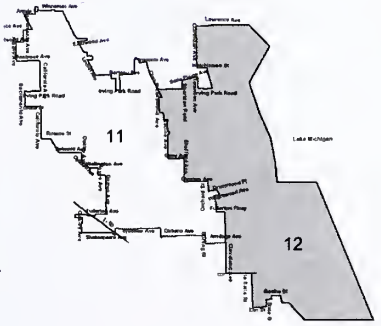
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